

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



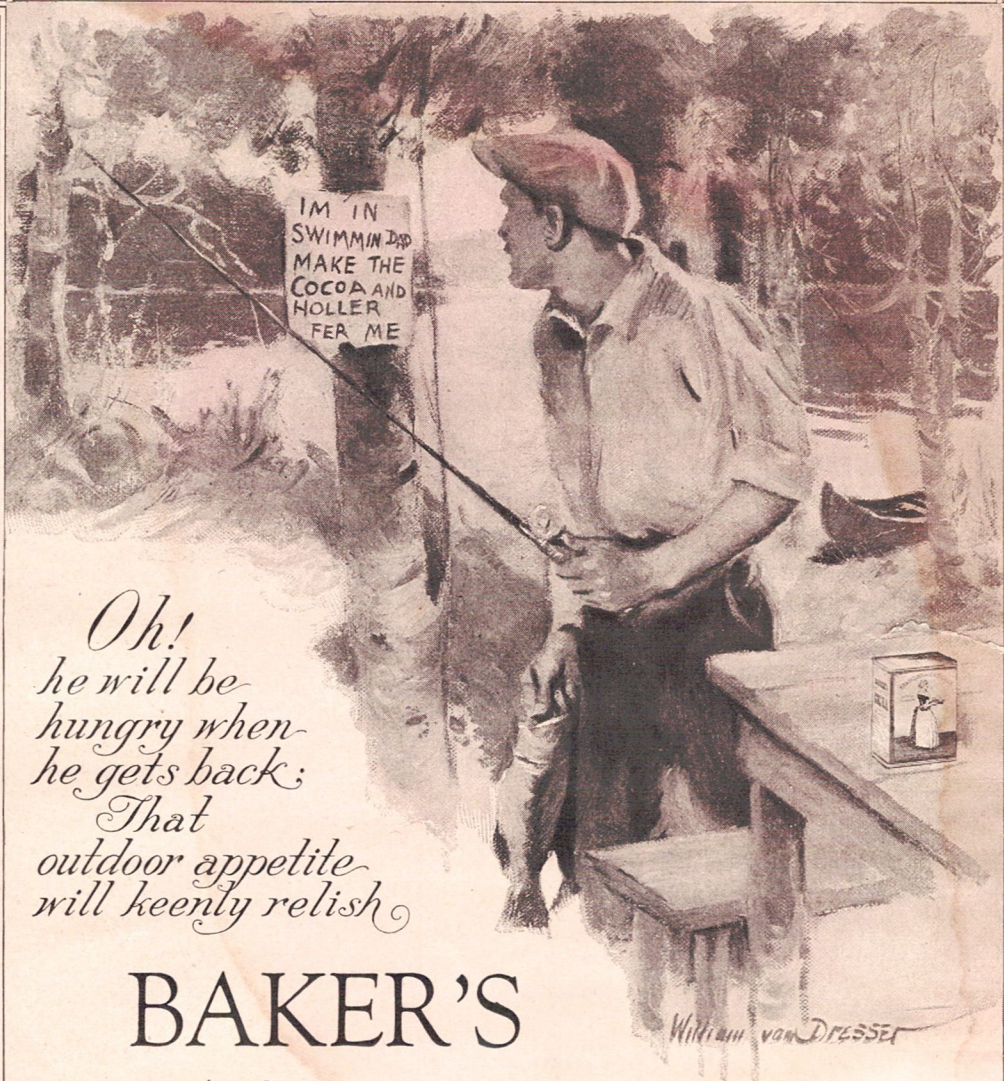
Charles
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*Sequel to
"Mystery Land"*

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JULY 19

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXI

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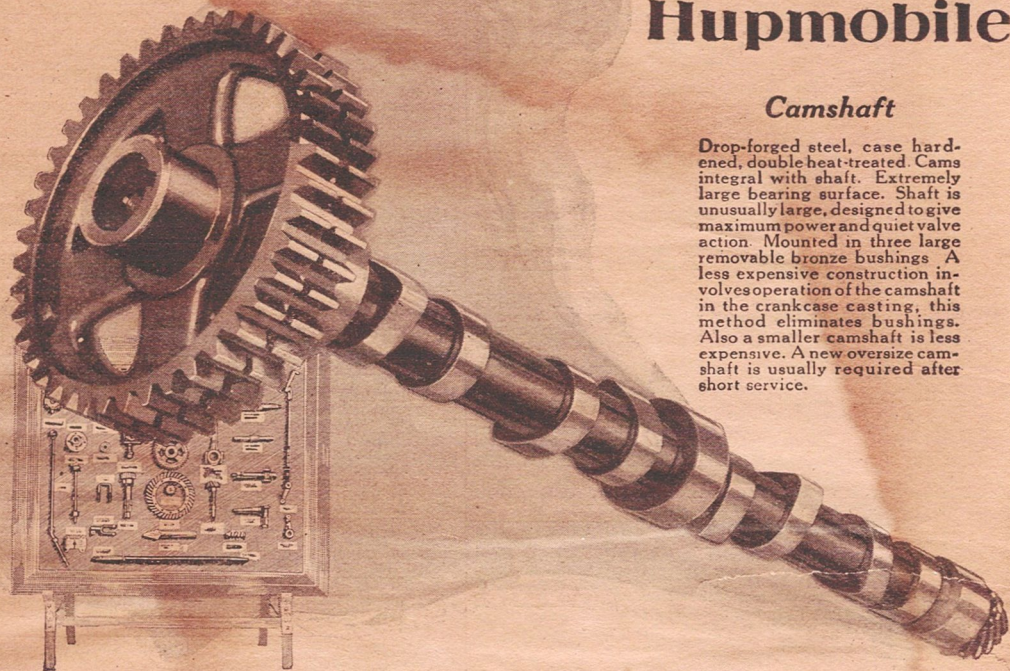
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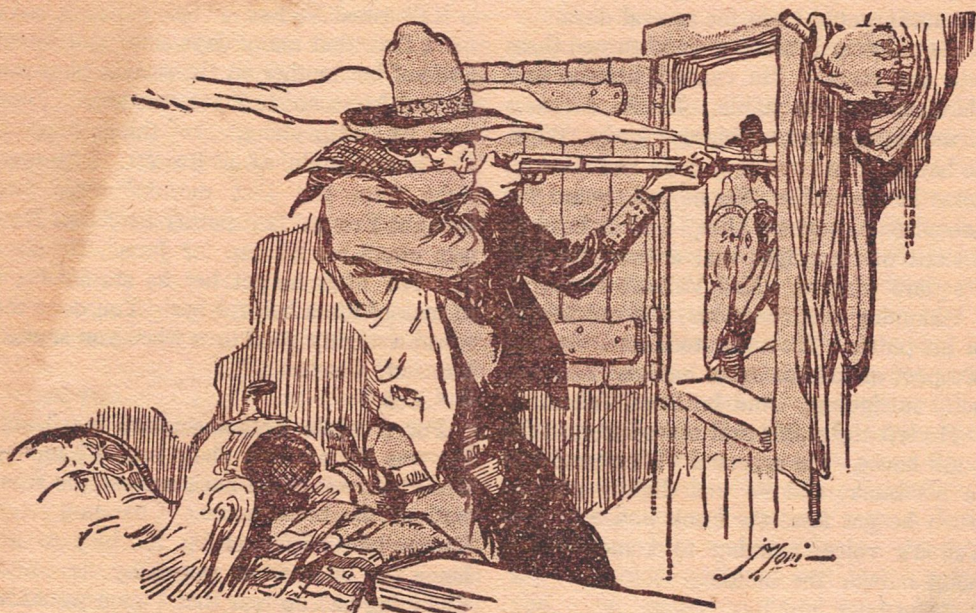
Hupp Motor Car Corporation
Detroit, Michigan

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXI

SATURDAY, JULY 19, 1924

NUMBER 5



Channing Comes Through

By **CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER**

Author of "Mystery Land," "Riddle Gawne," etc.

CHAPTER I.

NEWS OUT OF THE NIGHT.

CHANNING had the first pang of lonesomeness when he came in sight of the ranch house. Its windows were dark. The pale moonlight revealed the outlines of the rambling building, the heavy timber beyond, the fringing shrubbery of the garden. There was no life, no

movement. Channing had known he would be affected by the loneliness of the place, but he had not been prepared for the dismal regret that seemed to have settled upon him so heavily that it bowed his shoulders.

He halted the horses and sat for a few minutes in the buckboard meditatively looking at the ranch house. His eyes were glowing; the muscles of his face were corded. But he made no sound. No word of

complaint passed his lips; no bitter thought took shape in his mind. He had lost, but he wasn't going to whine about it.

He clucked to the horses and guided them down along the corral fence to the bunk house. The bunk house was dark, which was as it should have been since he had no expectation that any of the men of the outfit would be in for several days.

He unhitched the horses and turned them into the corral. He carried harness and blankets into the stable. In the darkness of the stable a horse whinnied lowly. When he had left that morning there had been no horse in the stable. He moved toward the animal and caught a glimpse of its head in a shaft of moonlight that entered through a square window. Ned Vallon's horse.

Channing was conscious of a quickening of his pulses. He understood now that the prospect of lonesomeness had not been exactly intriguing. And he liked Vallon.

He left the stable and moved toward the bunk house. He expected Vallon would be in his bunk, and he was slightly startled when he got near the bunk house to hear Vallon's voice, seeming to come from a point outside the building.

"Got back, eh?"

"Yep."

Channing moved to the front of the bunk house and dropped to a wooden bench. He suddenly felt very tired. As the weariness was mental as well as physical, he was glad that he was in the shadows where the moonlight could not reveal his face to Vallon. Vallon had sharp eyes.

"Town quiet?" asked Vallon, after a time.

"Yep."

"Eve got off on No. 10, I reckon."

"Yep."

"Wayne Warren go along?"

"Yep."

"Mrs. Bailey stoppin' at Red Mesa?"

"Yep."

"You sell Warren's hosses in town?"

"Warren sold them."

Vallon lit a match and held it to a cigarette. In the light of the match he saw Channing's face. He frowned as he snapped the match out.

"Well," he said, "I reckon the whole

outfit will be feelin' pretty mean. It was her yearnin' for Eastern ways that made her hook up to Warren. Mighty natural, come to think of it."

Channing did not answer. He had figured it out for himself and would do no more speculating.

"Ten years ain't so damned long, now is it?" asked Vallon. "Seems like it ain't more than that many days since you found Eve an' her mother on the station platform at Red Mesa an' brought 'em here. Time does sure skip along. An' things happen. I've been thinkin' of ol' Bassett. I knowed right from the first mornin' after you brought Eve an' her mother here that Bassett would set his cap for Jane. He done so. An' after he got her he started right in makin' life a hell for her. You done the world a mighty good turn when you snuffed him out, Channing."

"Yep."

For a while Vallon smoked in silence. He was sitting in a chair near Channing. The chair was tilted back against the front wall of the bunk house. Channing knew Vallon had been waiting for him to get home, to offer what sympathy he could. Channing had no fear that Vallon would be too effusive.

"What I can't understand," resumed Vallon, "is that after Eve likin' you so well from the go off, she'd fall in love with Wayne Warren. I reckon she didn't know him more than three or four months, did she?"

"Long enough," said Channing.

"Sho! So it was." A pause. "I ain't never been let into that secret proper, I reckon. Was young Warren hooked up with Eve's past life some way?"

"Son of her guardian," answered Channing. "Vallon, it seems you've been left out. It won't hurt you to know, now, an' I reckon it won't do you any good."

"When I picked up Eve an' her mother, Jane Winthrop, that day at Red Mesa, they'd got off the train to get away from a fellow named Green. They was members of Green's theatrical company. Eve had got sick, an' Jane had got off the train to look for a place where Eve could rest. I brought them here, never thinkin' that Bas-

sett would fall in love with Jane. Jane had been divorced from her husband. Seems he was no account.

"Anyway, he got hold of a wad of coin, an' when he died he left it to Eve. Wayne Warren's father was appointed Eve's guardian by an Eastern court. Warren came out here to search for Eve. He'd had some clw to work on. He stayed over on Two Forks, takin' in the lay of the land, before he sprung what he had to tell. He didn't say a lot until after Green came with that fake deputy to claim that he was Eve's guardian. That was after Jane died, you'll remember."

"Eve fell in love with Warren first pop," said Vallon.

Channing did not answer.

"Seems mighty damned lonesome, somehow," said Vallon. "Nothin' like it used to be. Things won't never be the same. Seems like you never had a chance with Eve, eh? Well, you never can tell about a woman!"

No; Channing had never had a chance. He perceived that now. No chance from the beginning. If he had been endowed with even ordinary intelligence he should have been able to see that Evangeline had never been meant for him. He had only to send his thoughts back to that first day at Red Mesa to convince himself of that. Eve had been too fine for him, too delicately nurtured. From the first she had represented the unattainable, and in his blundering way he had disregarded his own inferiority. His passion for her had blinded him to his impudence in even thinking of her. She reminded him of a fragile flower transplanted into the desert. And he, as a blundering horseman, would have ridden over her to crush out every vestige of her beauty. Sure; he had wanted her. And if Providence had not conspired against him he would have taken her. She would have been crushed against the iron-like traditions of desert life.

Ten years! He had known her that long! So vivid were his thoughts of the past that he had only to close his eyes to see her standing before him as a child again, looking at him with eyes which had always seemed to search his soul.

"The Circle B belongs to her, I reckon," came Vallon's voice.

"Yep. Bassett died without heirs."

"She left you in charge, I reckon?"

"Yep."

Channing had promised Eve he would take charge. And now, suddenly, he knew he could never stay at the Circle B. He couldn't bear to stay where every tree and bush, every little stretch of grass would remind him of her.

"The boys certainly did like Eve," Vallon interrupted, almost startling Channing. "An' little things about her keep stickin' in my mind. The day before you brought her here the Circle B was nothin' but a hell hole, an' ol' Bassett was the devil, lackin' nothin' but a tail. Murder was in the air. Nobody liked nothin'. All a man had to do to start a fuss was to look a second too long at another guy. But the day after Eve an' her mother come they wasn't a man in the outfit that wouldn't make sugar look sour. The day she come I was figgerin' to quit Bassett; I'd rode in for my time.

"The boys was envyin' you a heap, Channing. Eve took a shine to you from the beginnin'. She growed up alongside you, you might say. Always hangin' around you, especially after her mother got hooked up with ol' Bassett. I was bettin' on you till I seen how she took up with Wayne Warren. Must have been sort of hard on you standin' there at Red Mesa an' watchin' the train pull out, takin' her an' Warren away to get married—an' them mebbe not figgerin' on comin' back here."

Channing said nothing just then. Vallon lit another cigarette, and in the light of the match tried to see Channing's face. But Channing's face was averted.

"You'd take it, I reckon," said Channing.

Vallon was startled. Embers from his cigarette fell upon his shirt, glowed there and were brushed off. He gulped.

"What you sayin' I'd take?"

"The foremanship of the Circle B," returned Channing.

"Meanin' you're not takin' it yourself?"

"Meanin' that."

"Thought you said Eve had left you in charge?" said Vallon.

Channing did not answer.

"Sort of throwin' her down, ain't you?"

Vallon suggested.

"I'm through here, Vallon."

"Where you figgerin' to land?"

"I reckon I'll drift south a ways."

"Suits me," declared Vallon. "I've been sort of wishin' you'd take a notion like that. We could head south, takin' in the full length of the Pecos. We might run into somethin' around Roswell. If things don't suit us there we could keep right on goin' to the Panhandle. I've always wanted to see Texas."

"An' I've been thinkin' some of Tucson," added Channing.

"Sure!" agreed Vallon quickly. "Curious how a man hankers to see different towns, ain't it? Take Tucson, for instance. Ever since I've heard of that gosh durned town I've been wantin' to clamp my eyes on it! Sure as shootin' we'll hit Tucson. We couldn't miss it noway. When you figgerin' on cuttin' stakes?"

"At daylight," answered Channing. "If the foremanship don't appeal to you we'll have to turn it over to Belmont. That means we'll have to ride to the south fork. Belmont's there with the wagon."

Channing got up and walked away in the semigloom. Vallon watched him move toward the ranch house. Then Vallon also got up, entered the bunk house, lit a lamp and began to examine his war bag.

Channing entered the house through the kitchen door, lit a lamp and stood for some seconds glancing around the room. Then he went into the living room, held a match to the wick of the big oil lamp on the center table, and stood for an instant staring at the floor. He folded his arms and his chin sagged to his chest. His gaze was on a corner of the room, where Bassett had fallen after he had shot him.

After a while Channing walked to the mantel, from which he took writing materials. Then he went into the kitchen and seated himself at the kitchen table. An hour later he was critically reading what he had written:

EVE:

I did not reckon that I would ever do any writing to you, but that just shows how easy

it is for a man to be mistaken. I know I promised you that I would stay here and look after things until you got back. When I said that I did not have any idea just how things would be here after you had gone. Seems I have sort of lost interest in the Circle B, if I ever had any. I ain't so sure that I did have any interest. If any man was to ask me right now why I kept on staying here I reckon I couldn't explain. Any more than I can explain why I am going away now. Maybe shooting Bassett has something to do with it. I keep on seeing him just as I shot him. Bassett was a mean cuss all right, but since he's dead I have been seeing things a little different. His head was touched a little, I reckon, and maybe if he had been in his right senses things would have been different. I should have gone away before it happened because I knowed that if I stayed around here long enough he would pull a gun on me. But that isn't anything for you to worry about. It was between him and me. I am putting Belmont in charge. He is a good man. I did not shake hands with you the second time to-night because I did not want you to see how things was with me. But Warren will make you happier than I could.

Yours respectfully,

LAWRENCE CHANNING.

He sat, considering the missive. It didn't say what he had wanted to say, but with all its shortcomings he felt it conveyed his thoughts much better than he could have expressed them verbally. He had always been mute in Eve's presence, his thoughts had always been more or less chaotic with her looking at him. He could blush now without her seeing him; and he poised his pen over the two final sentences, debating an impulse to blot them out. But he let them stand as they had been written because he would never see Eve again.

He got up, folded the letter and placed it upon the mantel in the living room, under a vase so that a corner of the letter was exposed.

Then he went out into the kitchen. He entered the living room again, blew out the light. He did the same thing in the kitchen. He was out on the rear porch when he saw a horseman sweeping over the plains northward. He walked down the path toward the bunk house and went to the door of the latter building, out of which streamed a glare of light.

Vallon was packing his war bag.

"Somebody's fannin' it, Vallon," he said sharply. "Put out that light!"

Vallon's leap and the darkening of the interior of the bunk house seemed to come simultaneously. Channing stepped to a corner of the building outside, where he could watch the coming rider. He felt Vallon beside him.

The horseman was riding fast, and was heading straight for the bunk house.

"Somethin's sure eatin' *him!*" said Vallon.

Channing felt Vallon's right arm move and he covered Vallon's rigid fingers with a soothing palm. He had caught a glimpse of the rider's figure in the moonlight.

"You won't be needin' your gun, Vallon," he said. "It's Jim Hale."

"Looks mighty suspicious for a sheriff to come rarin' into camp like that!" grumbled Vallon. But his hand dropped from the pistol holster.

Both men stepped into view when the horseman came close. He saw them, for he brought his horse to a sliding halt within half a dozen paces of them, and leaned forward to peer at them.

"You're sort of draggin' it some, eh, Hale?" greeted Channing.

"Whew!" A deep sigh of relief surged from the sheriff.

"Thought I'd have to ride to the south camp!" he wheezed. "Number Ten is wrecked. Fifty miles east! At Corwin's Gap. She split a switch an' run head on into Number Six! There's a dozen people killed! They're bringin' 'em back to Red Mesa! Hook up your hoodlum wagon an' beat it!"

Before the sheriff had ceased speaking Channing and Vallon were running toward the stable.

Number Ten was the train that had taken Eve and Warren eastward.

CHAPTER II.

"I RECKON YOU WOULD."

IT was two o'clock in the morning when the hoodlum wagon, driven by Channing, with Vallon sitting on the seat beside him, arrived at Red Mesa. Long before

the wagon reached the town Channing and Vallon could see a row of rectangular lights stabbing the darkness and the headlight of an engine streaking the western distance.

Channing surmised that an engine had been sent on from Red Rock, eastward, to bring the undamaged coaches and the injured passengers to Red Mesa. And before the hoodlum wagon reached the edge of town the engine and a single car steamed westward, bound, Channing supposed, to Laskar for medical assistance.

Channing's teeth were set, his face white, his jaws corded. Jim Hale had brought no names of the victims, and Channing's terrible impatience had expressed itself in the way he had driven the horses from the Circle B. There had been times on the trip when Vallon had been bounced completely off the seat of the wagon. His head had been bumped in a dozen different places. Half a dozen times he had opened his lips to protest to Channing, but a glance at the grim figure beside him had been enough to dissuade him. But Vallon sighed with a vast relief when the wagon came to a halt near the station platform at Red Mesa. Vallon remained in the seat for an instant to felicitate himself upon his safe arrival, and in that instant he saw Channing running toward the train.

The hoodlum wagon was filled with bedding, most of which Channing had taken from the Circle B ranch house. Vallon, whose mind was intensely practical, clambered down from the seat, entered the wagon from the rear and began to get the bedding into a semblance of order.

Channing leaped the railroad tracks and made his way down the platform toward a group of people. He saw that Red Mesa's lights were all ablaze. Lanterns were bobbing here and there, and the lights from the windows of the coaches streamed upon the platform. A crowd of men and women was grouped near the steps of one of the coaches, other men were hurrying back and forth between Red Mesa's buildings and the station platform, carrying various objects.

A negro porter from one of the coaches was carrying a flimsy canvas couch across the street toward the platform. He stum-

bled into a windrow of dust and fell, sending the dust spraying in all directions. No one laughed. Channing heard some one curse, saying: "Damn you, run!" He turned to see the conductor of the train scowling at a cowboy who immediately obeyed.

Channing paused before half a dozen bodies laid with suggestively careful precision on the platform. They were covered with sheets taken from a Pullman. They seemed strangely long, too long. Channing's hopes rose. He sought the conductor's side and questioned him.

The conductor's face was ashen. His voice shook.

"We've taken out eight," he answered. "There's more. Three or four, I think. No; I don't know any of their names. You'll find some of the injured in the next car."

A strong light from one of the car windows shone on Channing's face while he was talking to the conductor. As Channing moved toward the car to which he had been directed a man spoke to another.

"That's Channing, of the Circle B," he said. "Slick gun man. He can't shoot this thing out."

"Some of his folks in this mixup?"

"His boss, Eve Winthrop. She was goin' East with a young fellow named Warren, to get hooked up. Channing seems to take it pretty hard, eh? For a fellow that was cut out. Did you get a good look at his face?"

Channing mounted the steps of the car to which he had been directed. A dozen berths were made up and occupied by injured men and women. Other men and women in the aisles were giving the unfortunates first aid under the direction of a physician who had been on one of the trains when the accident had occurred.

Dazzled by the lights, Channing paused in the doorway for an instant. And then he saw Eve standing before him. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, her glorious hair was in disorder. But Channing saw her eyes grow big at sight of him. And the next instant she was in his arms, holding him tight and sobbing with her head against his chest.

"Where's Warren?" he asked after a time. And before she could answer he saw Warren lying in one of the open berths near by.

Eve had not spoken a word. But when she saw that Channing had seen Warren, she said, quaveringly:

"He will die, I think. Our car turned over and Warren struck his head. He hasn't moved or spoken or opened his eyes. The doctor says it's a fracture."

She looked up at Channing, her eyes piteously pleading. "Oh, Channing," she cried; "what shall we do?"

Channing's answer was to pat Eve's shoulder reassuringly. He was helpless, though hopeful.

"It ain't likely that he'll die," he said. "Warren's a rugged man, an' he's always lived clean. He'll pull out of this, sure as shootin'."

He felt her hands grip his arms and he looked down to see her eyes. The light in them was calm and steady.

"Channing," she said, "if he dies I shall die too!"

Channing's muscles stiffened, relaxed.

"Yes," he answered, "I reckon you would."

CHAPTER III.

AN UNEXPECTED CALLER.

THE hoodlum wagon, with Channing driving and Vallon frequently calling attention to imminent bumps, brought Wayne Warren and Eve to the Circle B about dusk the following day.

Warren had not regained consciousness, and a doctor from Laskar, who examined him thoroughly at Red Mesa, declared days would elapse before Warren would open his eyes. He confided to Channing that the chances were against Warren's ever regaining consciousness.

"He's got a mighty slim chance, but he may pull through. But any chance he's got he'll have to work out himself for the next few days. There's a great many that are hurt worse than he is. If I can get back within a few days I'll come and look at him again. But mostly his getting over it de-

pend on the nursing he gets, and his constitution."

Channing had driven carefully, and when the wagon drew up at the front veranda of the Circle B ranch house, Warren was carried inside and placed on the bed that had once been Bassett's.

Channing and Vallon were under Eve's orders from the time they placed Warren in the wagon at Red Mesa, and they did her bidding eagerly and quietly.

A change had come over Eve. The agitation that had marked her manner when Channing had talked with her on the train had been succeeded by a strange calm. Her face was pale, and her eyes had an expression of haunting anxiety which seemed to stab like a lance point into Channing's consciousness every time she looked at him, but she was outwardly cold and efficient.

Within an hour after Warren had been put into Bassett's bed everything that was humanly possible had been done for him, and Eve was sitting on a chair near the edge of the bed watching him.

Vallon had gone back to the bunk house. Channing, reluctant to leave Eve, was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, looking at Warren.

Eve seemed to know Channing was in the doorway, though she did not look at him.

"Channing," she said, "why don't you go to bed? There isn't another thing you can do."

"I reckon I'll hang around." He reddened a little. "I've moved my traps up here. I'm thinkin' of usin' the bedroom in the wing."

"I presume you moved your things up here from the bunk house soon after I left," Eve said.

"Right after I got back," Channing lied again. His "traps" hadn't been in the wing bedroom more than fifteen minutes. He had put them in through an open window of the bedroom while she had been busy with Warren. He had felt she would need him, and he didn't intend to be far away when the need came. He was glad she wasn't looking at him when the lie passed his lips.

She turned to him, and he saw that her face had become faintly tinted with crim-

son. And the glance she gave him sent a wave of warmth over him.

"Did you intend to have Vallon in the house with you?" she asked.

He screwed his eyebrows together before answering, darting a swift glance at her face in an effort to divine her meaning. Then he gave her an evasive answer:

"Vallon is my friend."

"Then he was moving his things here, of course," she said. "When we passed the bunk house I saw his war bag in the doorway, packed."

"I'd asked him to come," said Channing.

Eve turned and looked straight at Channing. He reddened, as he always did under her direct glances.

"Channing," she said softly, "do you know that from the minute we left Red Mesa I began to worry about you?"

"Shucks!"

"Yes. I don't know what got into me, but I seemed to have a conviction that you were not going to stay at the Circle B; that you were going to break your promise to me."

She continued to look at him, and saw the red in his cheeks grow crimson. "You weren't going to leave, were you, Channing?" She smiled. "You know I didn't expect to stay away very long. Not more than a month. Wayne and I had decided upon that just before the crash came."

"I've been here so long that I reckon no other place would seem like home to me," he again evaded. He was thinking of the note he had written to her, which now reposed upon the mantel, under a vase. His lying to her wouldn't matter, if he could manage to get possession of the note before she found it. He would be sure to keep the note in mind. After she went to bed to-night he'd get it and destroy it.

A gleam of trouble came into her eyes, a faint scarlet tinted her cheeks. But her voice was steady and her gaze still direct.

"Channing," she said, "it seems that word of what has happened at the Circle B has spread around the country. In our car after we left Red Mesa were two men who gossiped about me. One of them told the other the entire story of my experiences

here. The man was familiar with details. He told the other the entire story, from the time you took mother and myself to the Circle B, until you killed Bassett. He even told the other man about Bassett lashing me to the white horse, about my buying the gown at Red Mesa, and about those men in Red Mesa mistaking me for one of the dance hall girls. He told the other man about my staying in Wayne's cabin for several days. And he didn't mention that I was unconscious most of the time, and too weak to go away for days afterward!"

"Them kind wouldn't," said Channing. "It must have been Green an' his deputy that spread the story. I reckon Warren busted the man's head for him!"

"He would have done so if I hadn't begged him not to. I didn't want such a story to be repeated, of course. But the man didn't know me, and I didn't want the other people on the train to—to—I didn't want them to know right then—"

"I reckon I see," interrupted Channing. "They'd have stared at you. You didn't want that!" But Channing knew that if he had been in Warren's place one male gossip would have had his lips closed.

"Most folks don't know anything, anyway," he said. "They don't know what makes a big thing big or a little thing little, because most folks live their lives without any big thing happenin' to them. They've got no way to compare things, an' no brain to do any comparin' with, anyway. Them kind will do the gossipin'. You can't stop their mouths. A thing that has happened to them is big, an' a thing that happens to anybody else is little. An' if what happened to you had happened to a lot of other folks they would never quit talkin' about it.

"An' I've been thinkin' about what happened to you. Seems to me the white horse that Bassett lashed you to was made just for that purpose. Another horse would have rolled with you tied to his back; he'd have bumped you into trees an' brush to try to knock you off his back. Instead of reachin' Warren's cabin without a scratch on you, you'd have been torn to pieces."

He reddened, for he was thinking of that night. The mental picture of Eve's scant

attire, of the white flesh of her body, of her golden brown hair spread like a gossamer veil over her, was as vivid as though he had seen the actual picture only yesterday. And now, when he observed that Eve's embarrassment over his words was greater than his own—when he perceived that her cheeks were scarlet and that her eyes were downcast—he said gently:

"For a minute that night I hesitated about touchin' you, thinkin' you was an angel."

He paused and smiled, and for the first time in all the years he had known Eve he was aware of a complete absence of embarrassment in his manner.

Eve had been almost nude on the night Bassett had lashed her to the white horse to send her to the cabin of the man he had thought had bought her the flimsy gown he had ripped off, and Channing had looked upon her in that condition. And now, gazing straight at him, she saw that there was nothing more in the expression of his eyes than had always been there when she had looked into them. The flush left her face.

"Channing," she said softly—"dear old Channing."

"I made a promise that night," Channing went on. "I reckon it don't make any difference who I made it to. But I swore that if that white horse carried you without hurtin' you until I could get you off his back he'd never carry anybody else."

"So you bought him from Wayne," said Eve. "Or you wanted to, until Wayne found out why you sought him."

"An' Warren gave him to me."

"And you named him White Cloud. Why?"

"Eve, there was a white cloud followed you an' the horse that night." His cheeks were flushed again, but he spoke steadily.

"So I've got White Cloud in the little corral," he added. "The boys know he ain't to be rode."

"And the black outlaw that Bassett intended to lash you to?" inquired Eve.

"Vallon got him back into the box stall that night. He's still there. I'm goin' to break him for you."

Eve got up and walked to the bed, where she stood silently gazing down at Warren, who was moving his head restlessly from side to side. Eve leaned over and stroked Warren's forehead, but the unconscious man was unresponsive to her touch. Channing, seeing Eve thus occupied, moved away from the door and walked into the living room. His thoughts were upon the letter he had written to Eve; and he felt that now was a good time to get it into his possession. He was moving toward the mantel when he heard Eve's voice behind him. She had followed him and now stood within half a dozen feet of him.

"Channing," she said, "some one is coming. I heard a horse. Will you please see who it is? Perhaps it is the doctor."

He couldn't secure the note now, with Eve watching him. He didn't see the corner of the note that he was sure had been visible; he thought he must have shoved it farther under the vase than he had intended. He would be able to slip in and get it after a while.

He walked to the front door and stood for an instant peering out. Then Eve, who was standing near the center of the living room watching him, saw him remove his hat in precisely the diffident manner that distinguished him when greeting her. And so she knew that rider of the horse she had heard was a woman. Standing rigid, wondering what errand would bring a woman to the Circle B at this hour of the night, she heard a voice, soft, winsome and undeniably feminine, addressed to Channing:

"I beg your pardon for disturbing you, but is this the ranch that belongs to Mr. Bassett?"

CHAPTER IV.

A BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY.

BYOND Channing, standing in the glare of light from the big lamp on the center table of the living room, the owner of the voice was in plain view. Eve was amazed at the newcomer's beauty. Her face, as she stood on the porch looking at Channing, was softly outlined by the darkness behind her, and was framed by a

mass of glorious black hair which was arranged in glistening waves and coils under the brim of the small soft felt hat she wore. Involuntarily Eve's hands went to her own hair, to tuck in some stray wisps that she suddenly became conscious of.

The strange girl could not have been older than Eve. At least that was Eve's quick decision. She made another decision almost as quickly. It was that the strange girl was a lady.

Eve, though, was somewhat amazed at the girl's complete self-possession and the ease and grace of her as she stood, a half smile on her lips, her dark eyes glowing with something approaching amusement as she looked at Channing.

The picture she made sent Eve's thoughts skittering back to the days of her childhood, when she had seen magnificent creatures like this girl moving about on the streets, sitting in carriages, in theaters, in hotels and various public places. Without a doubt the strange girl was city bred. She was self-reliant, capable, confident.

"This is Bassett's ranch," said Channing, answering the girl's question.

"Mr. Dave Bassett?"

"Dave Bassett," replied Channing.

The girl's smile grew. She moved closer to Channing, as though now sure of her welcome. As she came forward Channing stepped aside and permitted her to enter.

"I wasn't certain," said the girl. "I got off the six o'clock at Red Mesa, and a man directed me here—the man I rented the buckboard from. There were times when I was afraid I would miss the house."

She now saw Eve. Her eyes brightened, seemingly with mingled relief and delight over observing the presence of one of her sex. Also, Eve was certain, there was a demure friendliness in the expression of her eyes.

Instantly Eve liked her, though she was somewhat perturbed over the enigma of the visit.

"Won't you be seated?" Eve invited. "You must be very tired after your ride from town. And if you will permit me I'll get you something to eat—a jerked up lunch, you know."

"It's very good of you," the girl accept-

ed. But Eve, about to move toward the kitchen, observed a puzzled light in the stranger's eyes.

"Perhaps I am not in the right place, after all," she said. "No doubt you folks have a perfect right to be here, and I suppose there is no doubt that I am being impudent. I apologize for that. But Mr. Bassett gave me to understand that he lived here alone."

"This lady is Eve Winthrop, Dave Bassett's stepdaughter," volunteered Channing. "I am foreman."

"And your name?"

"Channing."

The stranger laughed briefly, and apparently with relief.

"Evidently there is no mistake, after all," she said. "May I see Mr. Bassett?" Channing shook his head negatively.

"I reckon that ain't possible right now."

His gaze was steady, probing. He was trying to analyze the impression the visitor was making upon him. So far he had failed. His eyes were unsmiling, they even held a glint of hostility, for he felt that the young woman had no very good grounds for her intrusion. More cynical than Eve, less impulsive, he had detected an artificial note in the girl's voice, a certain subtle slyness in her manner that had aroused his suspicions. Therefore his voice had been slow, drawing, inexpressive.

"Oh, then he isn't here just now?" she said.

"No; he's not here just now."

"Can you tell me when I may see him?"

"I reckon you'd have to hang around here a right long time," Channing answered. "Dave Bassett is dead."

"Dead!" The visitor started. Her eyes grew wide with astonishment.

The astonishment, Channing decided, was genuine.

The girl seemed incredulous. She stared at Channing, at Eve. Eve nodded affirmatively. The girl seemed convinced, and while Eve and Channing watched her she dropped into a chair, covered her face with her hands and sat there, quivering a little.

Eve ran to her and stroked her shoulders, saying nothing. Channing stood near the door, gravely regarding both girls. He

said nothing while Eve tried to comfort the visitor; he was silent after the latter, seemingly recovering from the shock, uncovered her face and smiled gratefully up at Eve.

Eve urged her to "take off her wraps." The visitor had not volunteered to explain why she had come; she had not divulged her name. Evidently, however, she had some sort of an acquaintance with Bassett, though even if she hadn't the rules of ordinary hospitality demanded that she be invited to stay overnight. The thought of permitting her to make the return trip of twenty miles to Red Mesa never entered Eve's mind.

But Eve was worried about Warren, and after showing the visitor to a room she went in to the sick man, leaving the strange girl alone.

Channing had not moved from his position at the doorway. When the strange girl re-entered the living room, Channing had his arms folded and was gravely stroking his chin with the fingers of one hand. He observed that the girl had walked to the center of the room and was watching him. Also, he was aware that her interest seemed to center chiefly upon his worn and faded overalls, his spurless boots and his threadbare woolen shirt. And twice she stared at the big guns at his hips. He observed that each time she looked at the guns she drew a deep breath. The guns seemed to fascinate her.

He thought, too, that there was some uneasiness in her manner. It was as though she had some questions to ask but was in doubt as to how to word them. She had betrayed emotion at the news that Bassett had died, but the news had not shocked her enough to convince Channing that she had known Bassett very intimately. Nor had her emotion seemed real to Channing. And he had been slightly irritated by the atmosphere of sophistication that seemed to surround her, which was like a thin veneer covering the gentle womanliness of her, a sort of a shield to hide her real feelings. The womanliness was there, though, there could be no doubt of that. He felt it, was aware of its charm. He felt that if she exerted herself to please, she could be dangerously fascinating.

"Mr. Channing," she said, "would you mind telling me how Mr. Bassett died? What he died of?"

"He died of devilin' a woman," replied Channing.

She stared at Channing. He was now looking straight at her, and he saw how she tried to appear perplexed.

"He was devilin' Eve Winthrop," added Channing. "I killed him. He fell right over in the corner, where them ropes an' straps are layin'."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl, sharply.

Again Channing thought he detected insincerity in her voice. But he saw again how her gaze went to the guns at his hips. And now her cheeks paled and he was puzzled, for she could not produce her present pallor without feeling emotion. He wondered what emotion gripped her.

"Why—" she began. "I—I— Just how did it happen?"

She was rather breathless now, shaken. He saw her lips quiver and he felt a pang of sudden remorse for his brutal frankness.

"Bassett had been slowly losin' his mind, I reckon," he told the girl. "I reckon he never liked Eve a heap. For ten years, after he married Eve's mother, he was able to hold himself in pretty well. But after Eve's mother died he got worse an' worse. He'd got hold of a book Eve had, which had a poem called 'Mazeppa' in it. Readin' about the wild horse sort of got on his mind, got him to broodin'. The broodin' give him an idea.

"Seems about the time he got the idea a young fellow named Wayne Warren come into the country. Eve got to likin' Warren. Eve had been raised East. Her mother had been an actress. Eve, too, when she was little. Eve had always liked nice dresses. She went to Red Mesa one day an' bought one. Jay Ventray an' Buck Lane, seein' the new dress an' thinkin' Eve was a dance hall girl, got fresh with her. She shot Ventray, but didn't kill him. Thinkin' she had, she lit out for Warren's shack, bein' afraid to come home for fear the sheriff would get her for killin' Ventray. Near Warren's shack she was thrown from her horse, hurtin' her head. Warren took her into his shack an' nursed her till she got well.

"When she got home again she was tryin' on the new dress. In this room. Bassett came in an' saw it on her. He tore it off, accusin' her of havin' let Warren buy it for her. Then he carried her outside an' lashed her to the horse she had rode home on. I come in here right after an' Bassett told me what he had done. So I shot him. That pile of ropes you see layin' there was where he got the ropes to tie Eve to the horse. He fell on them when I killed him."

There was no pretense of emotion in the strange girl's eyes now. The horror in them was genuine.

"Oh!" she exclaimed: "How terrible! Mr. Bassett must have been demented!"

"So he ain't here any more," finished Channing.

The girl stood, looking at Channing. In her eyes was a new interest, wonder and awe. Again her gaze went to the big guns at his hips. She shuddered, closed her eyes.

At this instant Eve opened the door of Warren's room and stood in the opening. The light of a terrible anxiety was in her eyes. Her hands were clenched, she was biting her lips to keep them from quivering.

"Channing," she said, looking straight at him and ignoring the strange girl, "it is unbearable to sit here doing nothing while Wayne is suffering. And it may be days before that doctor comes. He may never come. Won't you please go after him?"

"Sure!"

Channing was turning to go out the door when the strange girl's voice halted him.

"Wait!" she said. "I may be able to do something. I have had a great deal of experience with sick people."

She smiled at Channing and Eve. She was now calm, and her voice had a confident note.

"Sometimes a doctor is not necessary," she said. "And you will have to go a long distance to get one. I was told in Red Mesa that all the doctors in the country were in Laskar, taking care of the people who were injured in a train wreck. Won't you let me see him? It is the man you called Wayne Warren, isn't it?"

The girl was now at Eve's side. Their low-voiced conversation Channing did not hear. He went out upon the porch and

from there saw Eve and the strange girl enter Warren's room.

An hour later, sitting on the edge of the veranda he heard a step on the floor behind him and turned to see Eve coming toward him.

Eve's excitement had disappeared. She was pale, but her eyes were calm and her lips were curved in a faint smile.

"Channing," she whispered as she came close to him, "she is wonderful! She has been a nurse in a Denver hospital, and cases similar to Wayne's have come under her observation. Why, she seems to know more than that doctor who examined Wayne at Red Mesa! She says Wayne isn't in much danger, that the fracture seems to be slight. He may be unconscious for some time yet, but I won't lose him. Channing, I wish you could have seen how she took hold! She is wonderful!"

"You've said that twice," said Channing. "We'll say she's wonderful. But so far as I know she ain't told what she come here for."

"If she saves Wayne for me I don't care what she came here for, Channing," said Eve.

"H'm. She's got a name, I reckon?"

"Yes, it is Elizabeth. I had to ask her, for I couldn't keep on calling her just 'Miss.' She didn't fancy it either, for she told me to call her 'Betty.'"

"H-m," said Channing.

"Channing," Eve gently reproved, "don't be so suspicious of everybody! I am sure she is a lady, and that when the time comes she will satisfy your curiosity about her."

"I reckon I ain't so terrible curious."

Eve smiled down at him.

"She is beautiful, Channing."

"I hadn't noticed."

Eve laughed, lowly. Channing stared into the darkness. He heard Eve recross the veranda, heard her step in the living room, heard the door of Warren's room close behind her.

Channing sat, considering Eve's laugh. There had been knowledge in it, gentle mockery. He got up, moved across the veranda, and stood for an instant in the living room doorway. Then he silently

crossed the floor of the living room and stood in front of the mantel, carelessly, lest Eve suddenly enter the room and discover him. Then, quickly, he turned and lifted the vase under which he had placed the note to her.

The note had disappeared.

Channing replaced the vase, and with his brows screwed together, went out again to the veranda and sat long on its edge.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRIFTER.

WITHOUT Eve's knowledge, Channing had removed his effects from the ranch house. Without knowing how he got it, Channing had a conviction that the strange girl, who had called herself Betty, intended to prolong her stay at the Circle B indefinitely. It was not Channing's business to interfere with whatever arrangement Eve made with her guest, but because she continued to stay, Channing thought it best to remove himself from the zone of friction. He did not like Betty.

Within two days two other visitors had appeared at the ranch. A tall, distinguished looking man, obviously an Easterner, had appeared at dusk of the second day following that upon which Warren had been brought from Red Mesa. The tall stranger was brought over from Red Mesa in a buckboard, driven by a Red Mesa man. The tall stranger stayed overnight in the ranch house. The Red Mesa man occupied the bunk house with Vallon and Channing, and he volunteered the information that the tall stranger was a specialist from Chicago. He had been sent to the Circle B by an urgent wire received from the elder Warren, who had been apprised of the injury to his son by a telegram from Eve.

The specialist was driven back to Red Mesa early in the afternoon. His coming explained to Channing Eve's strange lack of agitation over their failure to get one of the doctors who had been rushed to Red Mesa. Eve had betrayed agitation only once, and that had been shortly after the arrival of Betty. The assurances of the

doctor who had examined Warren on the train, together with her conviction that Warren's father would respond quickly to her telegram, had calmed her.

The second visitor was a desert nomad, or drifter.

Channing and Vallon were in the bunk house talking with the Red Mesa man whom they called "Red," when the drifter appeared in the open doorway.

The man was tall, slender. His woolen shirt was threadbare, and in tatters at the wristbands, revealing forearms burned almost black by the sun. The faded blue overalls he wore were much too large for him. They were drawn tight at the waist, the goods overlapping in great, wrinkled folds around his stomach and hips. They were tight at the knees where they were stuffed into the tops of boots that were run down at the heels and worn through at the toes. Had the drifter's legs been straight, the bulging hips running sharply downward must have made him resemble a "V" from his knees to his hips; but his legs were so bowed that he suggested an animated "U" turned upside down.

His narrow shoulders accentuated the broadness of the artificial hips. His neck, exposed, was as black as his arms. A black stubble beard of two or three weeks' growth covered his face, and a pair of steady, hawklike eyes, just now alight with cynical inquiry, gleamed at Channing, Vallon, and the Red Mesa man from under the brim of the drifter's shapeless hat.

"Grubbin' time's over, I reckon?" he said.

"You're a little late, stranger. But not a whole lot. We cooked enough grub this evenin' for a dozen. If you'll amble over to the mess house you'll likely find grub enough to fill your belly half a dozen times. An' still hot, mebbe. We didn't rattle no dishes, us havin' comp'ny. Help yourself."

It was Vallon who spoke. The drifter grinned at him. The drifter's teeth were long, yellow. The two in the center of the upper jaw were missing. Their absence gave to his face a singularly satyric appearance.

The drifter vanished. But before he did

so he looked long at the Red Mesa man, and at Channing. His eyes, though steady, had a vacuous gleam in them. It was as though with the one glance he observed every detail of clothing, of figure, of face and appearance that distinguished Channing and the Red Mesa man.

Channing sat staring at the dark rectangle of the doorway after the drifter vanished.

"That man don't miss nothin' he looks at," he observed, shortly.

"You're shoutin' he don't," agreed the Red Mesa man. "Since he left I've been wonderin' if he seen that there wart on the back of my neck. He's sure got funny eyes!"

Channing and Vallon were silent. Channing seemed preoccupied, Vallon's brows were drawn together as though he were trying to solve a difficult mathematical problem and was summoning a laggard sense to his aid.

The Red Mesa man alone seemed to be thought-free.

"Looks like a scare-crow which has got loose when nobody was lookin'," he went on. "If them pants of his'n was any looser he'd have to crawl half a mile to get out of them, say he was layin' down. An' them legs! Say! I've seen guys which had got bow-legged from ridin' hosses, but I reckon that when that guy was a kid his maw must have grabbed him by the back of the neck an' jammed him down an' bent 'em. Any hoss which could throw him would have to starve hisself to a shadder an' slip out between his legs."

The drifter stayed on after the Red Mesa man left to drive the specialist back to Red Mesa. But dawn disclosed the drifter cuddled in his blankets beside the horse corral fence, within a stone's throw of the bunk house, where he might have had his choice of a number of bunks. That he chose to sleep in the open seemed merely to indicate fixity of habit. But a later questioning by Vallon proved that his preference had swayed him.

"I shore don't like that red-headed man!" declared the drifter. "When thar's any polecats around I want to git away from the smell of 'em. If I wasn't a peace-

able man I'd shore bust him a few for what he said about my legs. I shore would!"

Vallon made no comment on this. He wasn't sure that the drifter was a peaceable man. Vallon's brows were still thoughtfully wrinkled. He hadn't slept much during the night. He had kept thinking of the drifter. Somewhere, some time, he had seen those legs and the drifter's face. But it seemed to him that his memory was playing tricks with him. It was as though the drifter was in a haze. If he should come nearer, out of the haze, Vallon would be able to identify him, the name that was mute on the tip of his tongue would be spoken.

As often as he could during the day, Vallon watched the drifter.

The drifter hadn't gone on his way after breakfast. He had plumped himself down on a bench outside the bunk house, had drawn an old pipe from a pocket.

"Reckon I'll hang out here a day or so," he said to Channing, who was standing in the bunk house door watching Eve, who stood on the rear porch of the ranch house. "You ain't doin' no objectin'?"

"Go when you're ready," answered Channing.

"I'm tired, sorta," said the drifter. "Been movin' around consid'able. This here's the Circle B, eh?"

"Yes."

"Saw yore brand back a ways, yest'idy. Seems like I heard of it before. Feller named Bassett runs it, don't he?"

Channing nodded.

"Whar's he now?"

"Dead."

"Sho! Yu' don't say!"

Channing was still watching Eve. He saw the Eastern doctor standing near her, talking to her. He saw a smile on Eve's lips. Therefore Channing gathered that the doctor was telling her some news which pleased her.

"What did Bassett die of?" questioned the drifter.

Channing tapped the gun in his right holster.

"Meanin' you killed him?"

There was no change in the drifter's voice as he asked the question. All along

it had been high-pitched, garrulous. It hadn't altered a shade.

Channing nodded his head a quarter of an inch. He had observed that the Eastern doctor had bowed to Eve, and Channing was proud of her.

"So you downed Bassett, eh?" said the drifter. He was smoking his pipe and deliberately blowing long wisps of smoke upward and outward and watching the smoke trail off and disintegrate. And now Eve and the doctor had vanished from the porch, and Channing folded his arms over his chest and looked down at the drifter.

Channing was standing, the drifter was sitting.

"Shucks," drawled the drifter; "you must be a wolf with a gun. I've heard that Bassett wasn't no slouch when it come to gittin' his gun workin'. Yes, you shore must be a wolf—if you downed Bassett fair."

"Have you got any idea that I didn't down him fair?" asked Channing slowly.

"Shucks," said the other, seeming to become aware of the coldness of Channing's voice. "I ain't meanin' to nag you none. Likely it was fair. If you say it was that ought to settle it. If yore Rip Channing I ain't none surprised that Bassett got his'n. Used to be right slick with a gun yoreself, didn't you?"

"Stranger," said Channing, "if Bassett had had your mouth he'd have talked himself to death."

The drifter gave no sign that he had heard. To all appearances he was undisturbed by the sharp rebuke. He did not look at Channing; he continued to smoke his pipe and to watch the smoke float outward and upward.

Channing waited a little. Then he walked past the drifter and went to the stable.

The drifter sat and smoked, calmly, imperturbably. He betrayed no visible sign of mental agitation. But his vacuous eyes were now swimming with passion. He sat, still smoking his pipe. When the pipe spluttered in depletion he got up, walked to the corral fence, leaned against the top rail and seemed to stare over the fence at the horses.

Sitting on the edge of a bunk in the bunk

house, Vallon had overheard the conversation between Channing and the drifter. Vallon had been mending a rent in the arm hole of his only vest. He had finished while Channing and the drifter had been talking, but he sat silent and motionless long after the talk had been completed.

Vallon was bothered again by his inability to force his memory to work. As upon the appearance of the drifter the night before, Vallon was tortured by something familiar about the man. Out of the haze of many yesterdays he conjured mental pictures of all the men he had known in the past in an effort to create a counterpart of the drifter. He failed. Many men with bow legs he had seen. Other men there were who had teeth missing. Hundreds of men in the old days had worn their guns low on their hips, where the drifter wore his. Men with steady eyes were not rare, and the baffling vacuity of the drifter's was to be observed in the gaze of all men who were habitually watchful and suspicious.

When Vallon heard the drifter move away he got to his feet and watched him from behind the muslin curtain of a small, open window. With corrugated brows, his eyes narrowed to mere slits, he studied the drifter's figure as the latter stood at the corral fence.

Vallon was uneasy. He felt there was something wrong. To be sure there was nothing much out of the ordinary in having a desert rat drift in as this man had come. His kind usually slipped in without ostentation and departed the same way. No one would ask where a drifter came from and no one would inquire where he was going. Nobody cared very much.

It wasn't that the drifter had done anything out of the ordinary. He had asked for the grub he had taken; he had offended no one. He had slept in the open, as became a man of his habits of life; he had staked out his horse and pack animal in the approved fashion. He had not been inquisitive, except to Channing, and then only mildly; he had asked no embarrassing questions; he appeared inoffensive.

And yet Vallon was not satisfied. He was vaguely troubled, was conscious of irri-

tation; a conviction that there was mystery here annoyed him.

He studied the man's legs again. He was certain that away back in the past he had seen those legs. He felt there was not another pair exactly like them in the country. Somewhere, sometime, he had seen them before. But he couldn't remember.

"Must have been a hell of a long time ago," he decided.

He rested his elbows upon the window sill, dropped his chin to his arms and continued to watch the drifter. He observed that the drifter's movements were furtive, stealthy, that his long, skinny arms were restless. The drifter stood back a little distance from the corral fence, now, and as Vallon watched him, the drifter stole a rapid glance at the stable, into which Channing had gone. One of the drifter's hands came slowly upward and stroked his chin. The hand dropped. Both were now hanging loosely at his sides. They moved jerkily upward, the hands sliding along the faded overalls. They slipped upward, lingering momentarily at his gun holsters, one at each hip. The fingers halted for an instant at the butts of the guns, seemed to lightly caress them. Then the arms slid up and were folded over the drifter's chest.

There was something sinuous and smooth about the movement of the drifter's arms. They reminded Vallon of the sliding, slithering stealth of a rattlesnake coiling to strike, leisurely, knowing there was plenty of time.

Once again the drifter glanced at the stable. Then Vallon saw his right hand slipping down toward his waistline, where the ridiculously ample overalls were folded. Vallon saw the hand vanish and then come quickly upward, gripping the butt of a third gun. The drifter glanced downward, critically. He slipped the gun back into its hidden sheath.

At that instant Channing emerged from the stable. Likewise, at the same instant illumination came to Vallon. A name flashed into his memory, a name that seemed to startle him, for his face grayed and he caught his breath quickly.

Channing walked toward the corral gate. A saddle was on his shoulder, a coiled rope hung from the crook of his left elbow.

He paid no attention to the drifter, who was standing near the gate watching him. He placed the saddle on the top rail of the corral fence and with the coiled rope still upon his left arm began to lift the bar of the corral gate.

"Sort of short-spoken this mornin', eh?" said the drifter.

The drifter was now facing Channing. His arms were folded loosely just above his hips. He was slowly rocking back and forth, and his ridiculous legs were sprawled far apart. There was a mirthless grin on his lips, which were spread enough to reveal his yellow teeth.

"Meanin' what?" asked Channing.

Channing had stiffened at the drifter's voice. He stood, one hand on the wooden bar of the corral gate, trying to read the riddle of the drifter's manner. He felt the menace of the drifter's mirthless smirk, he was aware that behind it lurked violence. He had been caught at a disadvantage, and he knew that if he drew his right hand away from the bar of the corral gate it must go unerringly and rapidly to the gun at his right hip. He knew the distance was too great. The drifter meant to kill.

"Keep a-hangin' onto that bar, Channing!" warned the drifter. "Keep a-hangin' onto it! If yore fingers slip one little wee slip I'll bore you right through the guts!

"Yore Rip Channing, eh? Old-time gunslinger! Used to raise all kinds of hell in this neck of the woods! Made 'em all walk soft an' easy when you was around, eh? Snuffed out Krell, the gun-man Bassett brought over from Red Mesa to salivate you, eh? Finally got Bassett, eh! Well, damn yore hide, Dave Bassett was my friend! Understand? An' I come around here to talk to you about him an' you don't give me no satisfaction! Tappin' yore gun like a damned swell head when I asked you what Dave died of! Tellin' me I'd talk myself to death!

"But I'm givin' you yore chancest; more than you give Bassett, most likely, you sufferin' shorthorn. I'm tellin' you fair that when you move yore hand from that bar I'm lettin' daylight through you! An' I'm tellin' you—Now!"

Channing's hand left the bar of the corral fence and moved with amazing swiftness across his body to his right hip. With the first muscular movement that had released the grip of Channing's fingers on the bar the drifter's skinny, stealthy arms had got in motion and the right hand had slid into the bulging folds of the waistband of his overalls. The hand came out again. There was a glint of metal in the sunlight. Swift as Channing had been, the drifter's movement had been swifter.

But the drifter's gun was not fully exposed to view when there came a spiteful crash from one of the windows of the bunk house. The drifter spun around, screamed with pain and fury. His right arm, shattered by a bullet from the bunk house window, hung crookedly across his stomach, like a broken arm in splints. The gun muzzle, still sticking in the waistline of the overalls, was held there, rigid, by the paralyzed fingers gripping the stock of the weapon.

Channing's gun was now out, its muzzle toward the drifter. But Channing did not fire, surmising that Vallon had sped the bullet which had saved his life. He waited, watching the drifter.

The drifter, screaming with rage and agony, his eyes flaming with malevolence, reached for the gun at his left hip. Again came a spiteful crash from the bunk house window. This time the drifter's voice was stilled. His mouth jerked open, he stiffened, spread his crooked legs wide, and shuddered. His left hand dropped from the butt of the gun at his hip, he slumped against the corral fence, doubled forward and went down, his right shoulder striking first. Then a spasmodic muscular motion straightened him and brought him erect, sitting, so that his legs stretched out in front of him, while his back was against the fence. He sat there, his chin on his chest, his shattered right arm limp, the other resting in the dust at his side.

Vallon came out of the doorway of the bunk house, rifle in hand. He moved toward the drifter, his eyes alert, cold. But he spoke to Channing.

"Slick, eh?" he said passionlessly. "He bothered me some. I couldn't seem to

place him. Last night I couldn't sleep, tryin' to get my mind to workin'. I could not seem to place him until I seen him inspectin' that gun in his waistband, while you was in the stable. Then it come to me. I seen him down a man in Yuma with that trick. It's him, crooked legs an' all. It's Yuma Slim. I reckon he's the orniest, snakiest gun slinger in the country. He's through now. I reckon I'd have let him live if he hadn't showed so venomous in tryin' to drag out that other gun."

Channing and Vallon stood, looking down at the drifter. He had been mortally wounded, for his face already had the gray pallor of death. But he was fully conscious and he raised his head and looked at Channing.

"I reckon I'd have got you," he said.

Channing nodded. He knew the drifter had had him beaten.

"But I reckon it wasn't any frame-up, either. Was it?" asked the drifter.

Channing's negative brought a shadowy smile to his face.

"Just one of them damned things where a third man interferes an' spoils it," he went on. He stared upward at Channing for an instant, studying his face. Then the shadowy smile came again.

"You're white, Channing," he said. "I am putting you wise. There's a guy named Green over in Laskar. He's a mighty mean man. He's aimin' to salivate you. If I got you I was to get two hundred." The drifter grinned, his chin sagged to his chest, and his voice became jerky, muffled.

"I reckon somebody else will try to collect that two hundred," he said. "For Green aims to—to—"

Channing knelt beside the drifter, then slowly got to his feet, shaking his head.

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE WARREN SLEPT.

CHANNING and Vallon stood, looking down at the drifter. "So you knew him?" said Channing.

"In Yuma, more than twenty years ago," answered Vallon. "He was younger then, an' I think he hadn't lost them two

teeth. An' he wasn't in no ways scrawny, like he is now. But his legs was as crooked. But I reckon mebbe I wouldn't have knowed him if he hadn't gone after his gun the way he did—slidin' an' slippery, like a side-winder. When I seen his arms movin' that way I remembered that was the way they had moved when he killed that Yuma man."

"I'm obliged to you," said Channing. "He had me faded."

"Shucks, you'd have got him," stated Vallon. "It would have been mighty close, an' mebbe you'd have got burned, but you'd have got him."

"If you thought so, why did you throw down on him with your rifle, Vallon?"

Vallon blushed. "He wasn't playin' fair, I reckon. No man's got a right to hide a gun on him that way."

A sound came from behind the men. Both turned, to see Eve and Betty standing near.

Betty's two hands were pressed against her cheeks as though ready to stifle a scream that threatened to come; her eyes were wide with horror as she stared at the motionless and huddled form of the drifter; she was shaking all over.

Eve's face was white, her slight figure was rigid, and her hands, hanging at her sides, were clenched tightly. But though Channing observed that her agitation equaled Betty's, she had retained her self-possession. Her eyes were burning with passionate rebuke, however, as she looked from Channing to Vallon as though searching in them for signs of guilt.

It was Vallon who could not sustain her gaze, and it was to Vallon that she spoke, her voice cold but quavering.

"Vallon," she charged, "you killed that man!"

"I reckon he's dead, ma'am."

"Why did you kill him? Why? Won't you men ever learn that there are other ways of settling differences? Vallon," she went on reproachfully, "you are getting too old to lose your temper like this. You have been here long enough to know that I don't like violence. And, Vallon, I won't have it! I tell you plainly that this must end!"

Channing met Eve's gaze, held it. He smiled gravely.

"I was just thankin' Vallon for usin' his memory—an' his rifle," he said. He explained what had happened, and his eyes gleamed and narrowed when Eve caught her breath in amazement. He saw the blood rush to her cheeks, observed that she shuddered as she looked at him.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. Then she smiled and held out a hand to Vallon. "I'll take back what I said, Vallon. I might have known you wouldn't—you wouldn't—"

"Sho! I know that, ma'am. Sometimes things look pretty bad until they're explained. A guy named Green sent him here to get Channing. He said Green was to pay him two hundred dollars."

Vallon did not see Channing's warning wink until too late. Then he reddened and stammered:

"I don't reckon—you see, ma'am, there wasn't just that much said—I didn't rightly understand, mebbe. You see, he done his talkin' to—"

Eve's gaze was upon Channing. He could not lie with her looking at him like that.

"Green sent him," he said. "I wasn't intendin' to tell you, not wantin' to worry you. It ain't nothin'."

"Nothing that a man hires another man to come here and try to kill you!" gasped Eve. "Oh, Channing!"

"Nothin' to worry about," added Channing. "Green ain't likely to succeed in his designs."

"But you have just admitted that if it hadn't been for Vallon this man might have killed you!"

"Well, he might have; but he didn't."

Indignation burned in Eve's eyes. She walked close to Channing, stood erect before him, trembling. The paleness had gone from her cheeks; they were faintly tinted with a deep pink that was preceding the crimson tide that was surging up the white column of her neck.

"Channing, there are times when I feel like shaking the daylights out of you. Some day that foolish unconcern of yours will make you careless and you will be k-killed!"

Channing smiled. But Betty, who had retreated a little and who now stood watching, observed his eyes fleck momentarily with a strange, amazed joy. The expression fled instantly, however, and his gaze became saturnine.

"I reckon on bein' able to take care of myself," he answered quietly.

Eve turned away. Later, in the kitchen, she stood looking out of one of the rear windows at Channing and Vallon, who were still standing near the corral fence. Eve's arms were resting upon the sash of the window, and Betty observed that her hands were tightly clenched and that she was again very white.

"Oh!" she said, her voice low, as though she had unconsciously spoken aloud. "I wish he wasn't so sure of himself!"

"Channing, you mean, of course," said Betty. "He is, isn't he? I—I think that was the atmosphere about him •that impressed me, the first time I saw him. I think I have never seen a man with eyes quite like his. The first time he looked at me I was frightened. He seemed to look right through me. He is a dangerous man, isn't he?"

Eve turned and faced Betty.

"Channing is dangerous to any one who tries to wrong him," she said. "But to those who are straight, and love him, he is as tender and as gentle as a woman."

"Has Green wronged him, Miss Winthrop?"

"Not directly. But Green hasn't been straight. What has happened to-day must be a puzzle to you." And then, feeling an impulse to confide in Betty, Eve told the girl the entire story, from the beginning: how she and her mother had come to Red Mesa in Green's employ; how Channing had thrown Green upon the train which had brought her mother, Green and herself to Red Mesa, and how Channing had brought her and her mother to the Circle B.

"David Bassett and mother married," continued Eve. "Bassett seemed to be jealous of Channing, and without reason, for Channing did not love mother in the way Bassett suspected. Bassett was afraid of Channing and wouldn't discharge him, because Channing had warned Bassett that

the day Bassett discharged him he would kill Bassett.

"Bassett seemed slowly to lose his senses. Each day he grew more morose and brutal. I think he really lost his mind entirely the night he tied me to a white horse belonging to Mr. Warren. I had been on the stage with my mother, and I had a longing for pretty clothes. I bought a gown at Red Mesa, and the day I rode over there to get it I had to shoot a man who annoyed me. Riding homeward I saw two riders at the ranch house. I thought they were the sheriff and a deputy who intended to arrest me. I decided I wouldn't be arrested, so I started to ride to Mr. Warren's cabin. Near there my horse threw me. When I came to I found I had been in Mr. Warren's cabin for nearly three days. I had to stay there longer, and when I got home I was trying on the gown when Bassett came into the living room and saw me. He flew into a rage and accused me of deliberately staying at Mr. Warren's cabin. He tore the gown off, lashed me to the horse I had ridden home on, and told me to go back to my lover.

"Channing killed him for that. But before that happened, Green had come here with a spurious deputy sheriff and with counterfeit court papers which professed to give him the power of guardianship over me. I was not yet eighteen, and Green thought to get control of a considerable fortune that had been left to me by my father, who had been divorced by my mother years before.

"Channing drove Green and the deputy away. And Green hasn't given up. He sent that man to kill Channing, and I am afraid he will send others. And Channing is so careless! He seems to think that nobody can harm him. I sometimes actually hate him!"

Betty knew better. What Eve interpreted as hatred was really nothing more than futile rage, aroused over a conviction of her helplessness. And Betty was aware that women were somewhat indifferent toward what happened to men they hated. Besides, Betty had watched Eve's face while she had been talking with Channing, and she had formed conclusions of her own re-

garding the quality of Eve's feeling for Channing.

But Betty kept her thoughts to herself. She had not yet volunteered any information about herself beyond what she had divulged to Eve in Channing's presence regarding her experience as nurse; and she had convinced the Eastern specialist of her efficiency.

Warren had regained consciousness under the ministrations of the specialist. After the specialist had departed in the buckboard driven by the Red Mesa man, Eve and Betty were standing near Warren's bed, watching him. He recognized Eve, and smiled at her, but he seemed puzzled over the presence of the strange girl.

"I seem to have been dreaming a lot," he said. "Perhaps I am dreaming right now."

"Not now," answered Eve. "And you are ever so much better! Dr. Link has been here. He was sent by your father. I telegraphed. The doctor says you are going to get better rapidly. But you are not to talk."

"I think I must ask some questions," insisted Warren. "Number Ten was wrecked, wasn't it?"

Eve nodded.

"Where am I now?"

"At the Circle B. Channing and Vallon brought you here in the hoodlum wagon."

"You weren't hurt, Eve?"

"Not even slightly."

He smiled again, fondly. "That's mighty good. I suppose there were people killed?"

"Yes."

Warren closed his eyes. His face was white and drawn, but his sufferings had seemed merely to accentuate the bold and rugged sweep of chin and jaw, to reveal more clearly the clean manliness of him.

Eve went to him. Kneeling on the floor beside the bed she did what she had done many times since he had been lying there. She smoothed his forehead at the edge of the wide bandage, stroked his cheeks, patted his hands and kissed him lightly.

Betty retreated to a window, where she stood looking out, apparently indifferent to Eve's affectionate and sympathetic attentions to her patient.

Warren went to sleep again with Eve kneeling beside him. She got up presently and smiled at Betty, who had turned and was watching her. Then Eve went out and softly closed the door.

Betty did not follow Eve. She stood near the window, looked for an instant at the door which Eve had closed, and then silently moved to the side of the bed, where she stood many minutes looking down at Warren. She heard Eve's step in the living room; heard the step gradually recede. Then she knelt on the floor beside the bed and did to Warren the things that Eve had done, in the same way, with the same gentleness, the same delicate restraint. Her kiss upon the sleeping man's lips was firmer, though, for Warren stirred slightly and smiled. Warren moved one hand, and his eyelids fluttered.

Whereupon, Betty got swiftly to her feet and went again to the window, where with her back to Warren she blushed, though her eyes were alight with defiance.

CHAPTER VII.

"WOULD YOU CARE?"

THE enigma of Betty's presence at the Circle B was not more puzzling to Channing and Eve than to Wayne Warren from the first time he had opened his eyes after the accident until now, when fully conscious and in complete comprehension of everything that was happening around him, he watched her as she moved about the room.

His first clear recollection of her dated back several days ago, when he had opened his eyes to see her and Eve in the room, watching him. He had a vague mental picture of Betty before that, in a time when he seemed to have been dreaming. He had seen her face close to his several times, but his vision had seemed faulty and she had appeared to be some distance from him, in a haze. But by reasoning a little he finally concluded that the girl had been hovering near him for several days before he had succeeded in getting a good grip upon his consciousness.

Now, though he had fixed her clearly in

his mind as a living entity, and as a ministering human of rare beauty, he had not solved the mystery of her presence. And he was filled with a torturing curiosity concerning her.

"You have been here for some time, Miss—" He paused. Standing beside the dresser upon which were several bottles of medicine and some glasses, she smiled.

"Betty," she provided.

"Miss Betty," Warren repeated. "There must be more of it," he added.

"That is quite enough for the present."

"Then it will have to do," he answered, with an air of patient resignation. "But perhaps you will help me to get a certain mystery cleared up. It is this: Were you at the Circle B before I came or did you come afterward?"

"I came afterward. In the evening of the first day."

"Then I haven't been dreaming so much after all. Several things that I remember must really have happened."

To his astonishment her cheeks grew suddenly crimson. He watched her from his pillow, marveling over the miracle. She was greatly embarrassed, and the fact that she turned her back to him and pretended to be busy with the bottles on the dresser did not mislead him.

But he had no desire to embarrass her further. As a matter of fact, he assured himself that though she was very beautiful, absolutely bewitching in her embarrassment, his feeling toward her was merely that of gratitude over the care and attention she had given him. She was good to look at, of course, but she was not attractive enough to sway his thoughts seriously from Eve. Yet he wondered why it was that now he was fully awake and in tune with life again, he did not immediately ask for Eve.

He felt a sudden sense of guilt, and asked that Eve be sent to him.

"Miss Winthrop is out riding," Betty informed him.

"With Channing, I presume."

Betty nodded affirmatively. Though Betty covertly watched Warren for signs of mental disturbance over the news she had given him, she decided he was not jealous of Channing. But Warren's head

was turned away from her. He was gazing out of one of the windows, meditatively, it seemed.

Warren had relieved his mind of the feeling of guilt. It wasn't his fault that Eve had gone away and left him with this attractive girl. He was a trifle exhilarated over the situation. He was conscious of no regret over Eve's absence. In fact, though he dismissed the idea as absurd, he was rather pleased that Eve wasn't there at the moment. There was something about the strange girl that awakened new emotions in him. And there was the mystery of her blush to be explained.

"You came afterward," he said. "Did Miss Winthrop send for you?"

"I happened to be passing the Circle B. Miss Winthrop told me you were ill, and I volunteered to help."

"You have had some experience in nursing?"

"At a hospital in Denver."

"I have a suspicion that I owe you much, young lady. I shall not attempt to thank you until after I am able to get around and discover things. What did Dr. Link have to say?"

"You had a slight fracture. It might have resulted seriously. The danger is over. You are to be very quiet and get all the rest you can for several days. Meanwhile, I am ordered to stay until you feel I can be dispensed with."

"Will your staying here interfere with any plans you might have made?"

"Not in the slightest."

She smiled at him as she moved toward him.

"I think you are talking just a little too much," she said. "It is against Dr. Link's orders, you know."

She was standing over him now, and with professional directness laid a hand upon his forehead. But there was nothing professional about her blush as he looked into her eyes, wondering at the gentleness of her touch.

"Go to sleep," she admonished, softly. "Close your eyes."

He was glad to obey, because he was afraid the thrill that had swept over him

at the enchanting vision she made bending over him would be visible to her in his eyes. He was tempted by the forbidden, and he was amazed to discover that this girl had awakened something in him which had been lacking in his love for Eve.

Betty moved to the windows and drew the shades. She came again to Warren's side, bent over him and readjusted the bandage on his head. Then her hand again lightly touched his forehead and the fingers brushed his cheek, lingeringly.

His eyes opened again to gaze directly up into hers. Her gaze was as steady as his.

Both smiled.

"You are going to stay here?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Do you know," he said seriously, "I have a conviction that you are urging me to sleep so that you can steal away. You intend to vanish as mysteriously as you appeared."

"Would you care?" she asked, her cheeks aflame.

"Yes. I think I would care very much. I don't want you to go without letting me know. Will you promise that?"

"Yes," she answered softly, "I promise."

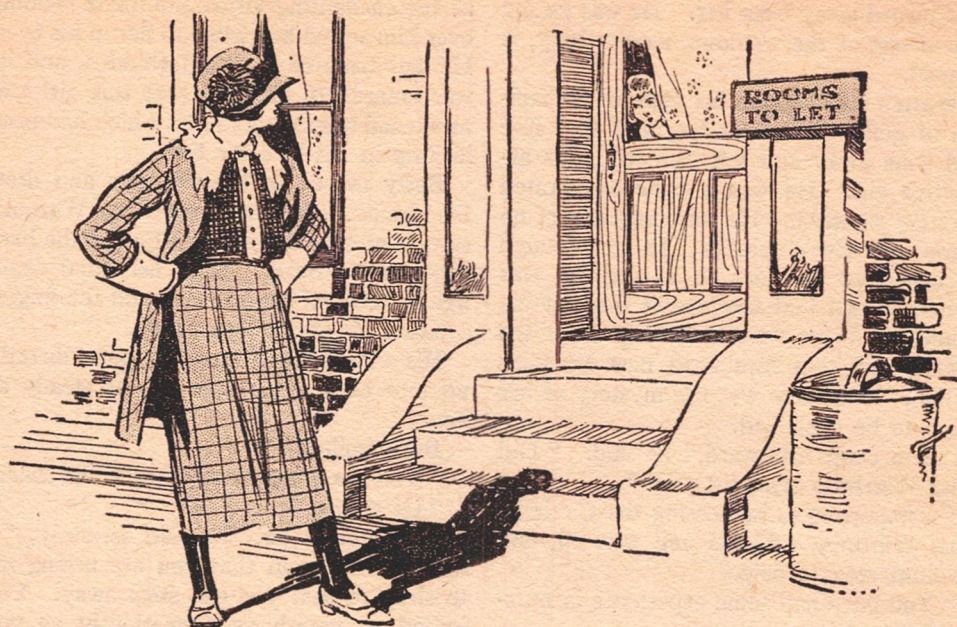
"Then I will be able to go to sleep," said Warren.

Betty patted Warren's hand which was lying on the coverlet.

Unknown to Betty and Warren, Eve had ridden in a short time before. She had quietly entered the house from the front veranda, and she now stood in the half-open doorway of Warren's room, her hand reaching out to grasp the knob.

The words of Warren and Betty were clear and distinct, though their voices had been low.

Eve's face grew suddenly white, and her hand dropped to her side. She retreated softly through the living room to the veranda, stepped down to the hard sand of the level surrounding the ranch house and walked rapidly between some giant cottonwood trees into the quiet and shade of a small clearing. There was the merest shadow of an ironic smile upon her lips.



Gentlemen Only

By REITA LAMBERT

Author of "Suspicion."

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

IT is perhaps the most popular phrase in the long columns of the classified ads section of any of the metropolitan dailies, but its true significance has never been properly analyzed. How much feminine bitterness might be traced to that eclectic monition! How many "comfortable, moderately priced, handsomely furnished" and altogether desirable rooms are available to "gentlemen only," while feminine virtue and industry must content itself with second choice.

And the sinister restriction is no modern development in the profession to which it accrues. It was this very phrase that lured one *Samuel Pickwick, Esquire*, to his eventual ignominy and landed the weeping *Mrs. Bardell* in the Fleet. *Mrs. Bardell* was a

lady and, as *Sergeant Buzfuz* so touchingly pointed out, a widow. But both *Sergeant Buzfuz* and his fair client lived in pre-psychoanalytic days. They did not recognize the basic, biological truths upon which that historic case is built.

Certainly, little *Mrs. Amalie Ladd*, of Sharleyville, Kansas—who, like *Mrs. Bardell*, was also a lady and a widow—did not search out her true motive for appending the phrase to her carefully worded advertisement. *Mrs. Ladd* had but recently come to New York and this was her first venture as proprietress of a rooming house. It was her predecessor from whom she had taken over the small but sedate brownstone front on East Fifty-Third Street, who had suggested the sinister phrase.

"Whatever you do, keep women out of your house," she had warned Mrs. Ladd. "They're always messin' around in your kitchen or else sneakin' in a gas plate or one of these, now, grills and runnin' up your light bills. Rent your rooms to gents. They mind their p's and q's and don't try to do a family wash in the bathroom on Sunday morning."

She was a big, domineering woman, and Amalie had listened politely, although she already had her own ideas on the subject. But her lessor delivered herself of as much practical advice as the untutored Amalie seemed to merit. Having thus salved her conscience she departed, along with innumerable iron bedsteads and rickety chairs and devastated washstands and the major portion of a dimly remembered and not too ardently mourned Mr. Ladd's bequest to his widow.

That meager bequest and an innate and incorrigible domesticity comprised the slender capital upon which Mrs. Ladd's venture was built. It was indeed a daring and a worthy impulse that had brought her to the metropolis: daring because it meant leaving the comfortably rutted paths of precedent; worthy, since it would render her self-supporting and contribute to a deserving cause. Every one in Sharleyville knew what a cold and heartless place New York was—a friendless foster home for the ambitious offspring of every other State in the country. Thus, in supplying a home for a deserving handful of these ambitious foundlings, one might combine altruism with enterprise.

Hence, Amalie Ladd found herself of a bright October Sunday morning, happily re-reading her own literary effort in the Sunday *Sentinel* and marveling a little at the grandeur accruing to the printed version.

She was a compact little person, with young blue eyes and inadequate looking little hands and feet. She sat in the sunny back sitting room which she had reserved for her own use, and the sun struck through the dusty branches of a lone ailanthus tree and played hide and seek in her bright hair. The remaining rooms in the house, each of which had received its particular bit of renovation and its particular portion of family heirlooms, were ready. So was Victoria,

sole remaining feature of the old régime whose former nondescript status had been nicely defined by a neat uniform of black and white. So was Amalie herself, whose presence in New York was her one defiant gesture to all of Sharleyville.

She waited now, moving restlessly about the room, as athrill with anticipation as an angling novice in strange waters. She had cut out the portentous bit of print and propped it against the clock on the mantel-piece. She had expressed her willingness to interview applicants after ten, but that hour had not yet struck when the bell clamored shrilly and she heard the elevated Victoria shambling up the stairs from the lower regions. Her quickening pulse brought the color into her cheeks when the maid appeared in the doorway.

"Here's a man come to see about rooms," she announced dispassionately.

"Lodgings," corrected Mrs. Ladd automatically, and to the hovering stranger: "Good morning! Come in, if you please!"

He was a swarthy person, constructed in a series of rolling pillows beginning with an assortment of gradated chins that merged almost imperceptibly into an expansive stomach. The checks in his nicely pressed suit were slightly smaller than those of the average checkerboard and diamonds flashed from his dimpled pink fingers.

"I saw your ad in the morning paper," he confided genially. "I thought I'd run over and take a look at your rooms—"

"Lodgings," substituted Amalie patiently.

"A single room is what I want. You got a single room?"

"Oh, yes, that is if you mean a room with a single bed in it."

"That's the idea—but none of your cots, mind! None of these trick beds that fold up on you when you're asleep."

"Oh, but I wouldn't have a cot in any of my rooms!" She was shocked. "But I know what you mean, and I think they're criminal—nothing less! It's that sort of thing—cot beds and all—"

"Damned uncomfortable, anyway!" he summarized heartily. "What floor's it on? I can't stand many stairs."

Amalie's eyes were startled. But of

course, she excused him generously, he was accustomed to the chilly impersonality of the average New York lodging house keeper.

"Oh, I can understand that—a man of your weight," she smiled in friendly fashion to absolve him of any guilt on that score: "there was a man in Sharleyville—quite heavy—the doctor had warned him about stairs, but he *would* run up and—"

"One flight's about all I can stand," he told her, and moved toward the door. "I'll take a look—"

"Just a moment, please!" He turned back obviously surprised. "I—I—won't you sit down a moment? You see, before we go up—there are some things—some questions—"

She faltered into embarrassed incoherence at his bewildered glance. He came back, laboriously excavating a thin gold watch which he glanced at hurriedly.

"If it's about references"—she smiled her relief—"you'll find I ain't one of these fly-by-nights! I been in one place nearly a year, but the old lady's giving up the house."

"Then you've lived in furnished lodgings before."

"Since I was sixteen I ain't lived in nothing else but," he said proudly.

Amalie shook her head and made little clucking noises of sympathy.

"You've been without a home all that time?"

"You said it! I beat it away from the little old home town just as soon as I'd saved enough berries to cover my railroad ticket."

Her eyes were warm with compassion. Here was the unfortunate original from which her melancholy picture had been drawn.

"Then you're from a small town, too!"

"If it was any smaller you couldn't see it with the naked eye," he chuckled.

"Like Sharleyville," she mused. "You don't happen to come from Kansas?"

"I'm from up-State," he said shortly. "Now the last room I had—"

"Oh, then you're not so far from home after all," she rejoined. "You can run up to see your people once in a while!"

"I *could*." He laughed at the idea.

"But if I ever do it won't be in a perpendicular position. You say there's a regular bed in that room—"

"But are your people all dead?"

"Not so's you could notice it. I got more relatives up-State than the bob-haired bandit got press notices. How many flights is that—"

"Yet you never go home!" This was against all tradition. "But I should think you'd get very lonely."

"Sure," he admitted, "I like it."

"You never married?"

"Say, do I look that dumb?" He had been holding his watch in a cushioned palm. He glanced down at it now, with an air of finality. "But I'd better give that room the once-over. I don't need no Waldorf ballroom. I ain't in any two much—"

"You mean you—you keep late hours?"

"Oh, maybe some 'd call 'em late."

He winked genially before a sudden, dark distrust overshadowed his expansive face. "But, say, my habits is my own. If you're going to show me that room—"

"Please—you mustn't think I'm prying just to be rude!" She was twisting her fingers nervously. "I'm not, but this is a new undertaking for me, you see, and I do so want to make it a success. I know what you are used to—the sort of house. I've seen any number of them—where nobody knows anything about anybody else and nobody *cares*! But my house is going to be different—a real home, that's what I want to make it and for just such men as yourself, who haven't known the comforts of a home since boyhood." Her enthusiasm swept away all self-consciousness. "Why, I think the lodging houses in New York are simply criminal—so unfriendly, so heartless, and the women who run them thinking only of money!" She grew warmly confidential. "Why, Mrs. Proctor—she's the woman who had this house before—why, she told me herself that she didn't know the first thing about any of her lodgers and that she didn't *want* to know anything except the color of their money. Barbaric, I call *that*! And I made up my mind that my house should be a home—that's why I had to know something about you, so that there could be a perfect under-

standing between us. You noticed I put 'home atmosphere' in my advertisement. You see, I have a theory that if a man's home atmosphere is congenial there will be less incentive for him to—to frequent all these dreadful places New York is so—so—"

But the blank amazement that was pinking the broad face of her listener stopped her suddenly. He reached furtively for the low crowned derby that he had lain on a near-by chair and backed toward the door.

"Say," he said sibilantly, "what you ought to be running is a reform school for growing girls. They might like this home atmosphere you're talking about, but *me*—I'm off it!" He was sidling down the hall toward the front door keeping his eyes on her in a sort of fascinated terror. "If I'd 'a' wanted home atmosphere I'd 'a' got married or beat it back to the dear old cow shed. But I don't! All I'm looking for is a clean bed and a pass key—a place where I can call my soul my own without the neighbors hearin' all about it, see? No domestic time clock for me, girly!"

He opened the door as he said it, his checkered bulk filling the aperture while he grinned back at her and the next instant, the first representative of New York's homeless army was gone.

But Amalie was an incorrigibly optimistic creature. She was more hurt than dismayed and not at all cast down—when she began to rally. The stout and checkered gentleman was doubtless an anomaly and not at all the sort of lodger with which her benevolent dreams had tenanted her rooms. She had heard of his like; of those hybrid creatures who prefer the unanchored existence of a nomad, the better to follow their own dark devices.

She was still shuddering her disgust when the doorbell sounded its reassurance and she hurried to the mirror for a glance at her nose and a deft pat or two for her hair.

This time Victoria's quarry proved to be a long, gaunt young man, baggy about the knees and elbows, shaggy as to hair which was the color of new carrots. His manner was abstracted and a bit weary as he stood twirling his hat and staring, not through but at the determined Amalie.

"I'm an artist," he announced dully before her greeting had reached him. "I want a north room. It doesn't matter if it's small so long as it's north. Ten dollars a week is my limit."

She liked that unvarnished frankness of his. An artist, unkempt—poor. She felt her maternal instincts bubbling up into her throat.

"An artist!" she said and brought her small palms together in gentle rapture. "And do you do portraits or landscapes or—"

"Neither," he answered drowsily. "Unfortunately I have to eat, so I do fillers and illustrations for the wood pulp magazines and ads for comfy slippers. Ten dollars is my limit."

She was athrill with sympathy. Here was genius sacrificed on the altar of necessity. She smiled and simultaneously pardoned him for staring drearily back at her.

"Come upstairs," she commanded. "I think I have the very room for you. If you think it will do, we can talk about the price—and things—later."

She heard him plodding along behind her as she led the way above. Here indeed was a wonderful instance of the city's indifference, a worthy object for her yearning solicitude. The room she showed him faced the street. In it she had placed many of the treasured antiques that had graced her grandfather's house in Sharleyville, the mellow sheen and spindly beauty that only an artist could appreciate. "You should oughta get fifteen dollars for this room," Mrs. Proctor had told her. Amalie waved the artist inside, her smile persisting in spite of his gloom.

"You see, it has the north light and I *think* I've made it comfortable. The bed *looks* like a couch but it isn't. It's really a bed—with the headboard cut down and a real hair mattress—curly hair. It belonged—the bed did—mahogany it was—to my grandmother. *She* was a New Englander. But not having a bed in the room makes it look so much more like a sitting room, don't you think? Or you *could* call it a studio."

He was inspecting the room dismally.

"Uh-huh," he said.

"Are you all alone in New York?"

"Er—what? Oh, yes."

"I thought so!" She was triumphant. "Came here to study art and become famous, I suppose?"

"I'd have to throw most of this stuff out," he observed thoughtfully. "All those little doo-dads and watchacallems."

"You mean the what-not!"

"Uh-huh," he was still considering the possibilities of the room. "How could I get an easel in here with all that stuff cluttering up the place? And those curtains would have to come down. Keep out the light. Too frilly anyhow." He turned to her and spoke briskly for the first time. "Is there a bath on this floor? I've got to have a bath near for my girls."

Amalie stepped back against the wall, her hands fluttering to her cheeks.

"A—a bath for you—"

"They've got to have some place to dress and undress."

"Un—undress!"

"I do negligees and underwear, too," he explained and patted back a yawn. "Loose-knit underwear, you know it—'will not irritate the most sensitive skin, warm as toast and soft as talcum.' Maybe you've seen my stuff or maybe you know Loose-knit."

He stared at her reflectively. Her face was crimson. She was trembling with indignation which she knew to be quite unjustified since his gaze was as impersonal as the one he presently fastened on his cigarette. She fought down her own outraged scruples. Here was an opportunity for some missionary work.

"And you—you have to have models?"

He nodded.

"Pretty ones—nice figures," he laughed shortly and took her into his confidence. "The poor boobs who see the ads get the idea that all they need is Looseknit in order to look as beautiful as the picture. Now if there's a bath on this floor—"

"There is," she said, "but—but do you have to do that sort of thing? I mean, couldn't you illustrate tooth paste or—or things like that? Models!" She almost choked over the word, caught his expression

of amazement and hurried on. "I've seen the pictures—pretty teeth and something about savages having perfect teeth because they used somebody's tooth paste. I can't help thinking, you see—you're so young—and gifted, too, I'm certain—and these models—I've read about such things. And I can't help taking an interest in the young men who come into my house. I'd love to have you come, but those girls you speak of—those—models—"

She let it stand there a shivering outrage of a word, for him to inspect in all its wanton nakedness. But he was looking at her dazedly, seeing her, perhaps, for the first time, with her wide, horrified eyes and her pretty mouth pursed in disapproval.

"I really couldn't," she said firmly, "have them coming here—to my house—desecrating it! I want to do all I can—for New York. But that—no, I really couldn't."

And now he spoke, awesomely.

"Good Lord!" he breathed. "Holy cats!"

Then he turned and made swiftly for the stairs. She hurried after him, overtook him in the hall.

"You're not offended that I spoke so frankly, are you? You see, I only want to help. I've heard about it—about young artists having to prostitute their art—for money. It's very sad. But perhaps if I made the rent less than ten dollars, you could concentrate on—on higher things." She smiled at him, but she was very firm. "I really couldn't have that sort of thing going on here—models dressing and un—well, dressing in my bathrooms. But I might make the room eight dollars—or even seven. Mrs. Proctor said I should get fifteen."

The amazement on his gaunt face had given place to alarm. He was twirling his hat nervously. At mention of the price, he shook his head.

"Oh, no—thanks, it wouldn't do—the room, I mean."

"But the saving—"

"No—no," he was almost frantic as he edged gradually toward the door, "but it's very nice of you to suggest it—very nice." He had his hand on the knob. "But I

couldn't dream of taking advantage of your generosity. I couldn't dream of it!"

He left the door wide as he fled down the steps. His hat was still in his hand and the breeze caught his refulgent hair as he catapulted over the pavements like a flaming arrow.

II.

As she closed the door and went slowly back to her own room, there was hurt amazement in Amalie Ladd's gentle blue eyes. By noon the expression had become fixed. The charmingly worded advertisement had drawn enough applicants for her rooms to satisfy the most ambitious person. But Amalie was a great many other things besides ambitious. She was exacting, for one thing, and the applicants while displaying the greatest clemency in the matter of stairs and baths were singularly disinclined to discuss personal habits or family history.

"And of course, being a stranger and new to this sort of thing, I feel I really must have the confidence and coöperation of the young men who come to live in my house," she was saying desperately.

Sitting on the extreme edge of a very straight chair, her listener, the tenth by exact count, was regarding her attentively. He was a slim young man—*anemic*, Amalie had decided—with horn-rimmed glasses and scrupulously brushed dark hair.

"Of course," he said and his voice yearned over her, "I can readily understand how you feel. New York is so overrun with undesirables. You must protect yourself—"

"But it isn't only that," she interrupted and knew for the first time that she was understood. "It isn't myself I'm thinking of so much as the young men. That's why I advertised for gentlemen only—they're so much more helpless than women. And the environment of most of these lodging houses—"

"I know," he said fervently. "And when you can't pay much—I can't afford over eight a week—I only make thirty."

"Oh, but thirty!" she beamed. "And you're young yet. And perhaps you haven't been in New York very long."

"Six months," he confided. "I'm in the

publishing business—shipping clerk in Duke, Grace & Company, the music publishers."

"How nice," she hazarded brightly.

"I'm taking up literature in the evening."

"Literature," breathed Amalie. "And you are all alone in New York?"

"Yes," he said and sighed. "I've been living on East Twenty-Fourth Street, but I can't study. She will stuff up the gas jet."

"Stuff up the gas jet!"

"With cotton," he explained sadly and caught the charged sympathy she was emanating. "And the towels—two a week. I feel that I must make a change. I'm not a rolling stone—I hate changes—but I must."

"Why, of course you must!" She was indignant. "I can see that it's telling on your health. I'm afraid you work too late at night."

"It's the poor light," he reminded her.

"So hard on your eyes," she agreed firmly. "No wonder you have to wear glasses."

"I've worn them since I was ten," he told her. "That was the year my mother died."

"Your mother!" she cried. "Then you are an orphan."

"No," he admitted and sighed again, very gently. "I have a father but—well, we have nothing in common. Except the bond of blood which is, after all, no bond, do you think—unless there is sympathy as well?"

"Exactly," concurred Amalie and towed him back into more familiar waters. "So you ship music."

"And fill orders," he appended with a touch of pride, "for teachers mostly. Piano studies for the lower grades, oratorios for Easter and Christmas carols."

"And—and this, this new music—jazz?"

His eyes behind their glasses were fierce.

"I wouldn't," he told her vehemently. "It's bad enough to have to handle the other stuff, to fill orders for sentimental hokum. But jazz!—I wouldn't touch it."

"I think it's directly responsible for the crime wave," Amalie said firmly.

"Impossible!" He was quite savage. "And popular songs!"

"That one," Amalie broke in, "about fruit—oranges—or is it bananas?"

"Unspeakable," he agreed and mopped an indignant brow while she throbbed in sympathy.

With an abrupt return to the practical matter in hand, he glanced about him.

"It's nice," he said, "to find some one I can really talk to—some one who understands. But the room—I should love to come, but I can't pay over eight dollars."

She rose quickly, purposefully.

"I have one—a back room. Mrs. Proctor said I should get twelve for it. If you'll come up I'll show it to you."

"But I can't pay—"

They went up to that refrain. The room overlooked the ailanthus tree and the soiled extension walls of neighboring houses. There were chintz covered chairs and a broad couch and a little table holding a small family of tea things.

"And there's a little desk I can put in here for you to use when you study or write," she told him.

He regarded the room unhappily.

"It's too beautiful, it has the home touch, but I'm afraid I can't afford—"

"You may have it," she broke in, "for eight dollars."

"Oh, but you said—"

"Eight dollars," she repeated severely, "to you."

He was gazing at her raptly.

"You mean you'll reduce the price—for me!"

"Yes," she said resolutely. "I know I could get more for it, but I don't care so much about the money as having the right sort of people here. Young men like yourself who feel the need of a real home—some one I can feel I am helping."

"And you would take me at a loss!" He was breathless with ecstasy, but when she nodded he became thoughtful. "I believe—I'm certain I could pay nine."

"Oh, no, that would be too much—out of thirty—what with your meals and your studies."

"I could manage," he insisted.

"But I couldn't let you," she said sternly. "It would be on my conscience. Perhaps later when you are making more—"

"Ah! Then I can make it up to you! And in the meantime," his pallid cheeks were flushed, "you must let *me* help you. You're alone here—new to New York! If I could feel that I was being some help to you—some protection—"

"And you will," she interrupted earnestly. "I'm sure I shall need your advice on all sorts of things."

"Then I shall come in at once, to-day." He squared his shoulders resolutely. "Since you're quite alone here, the sooner I move in the better."

She told him, cordially, that of course he must move in at once and reminded him of the stuffed gas jets.

"I shall put a stronger bulb in your table lamp," she decided.

"It might be best to interview you applicants at the door," he suggested anxiously as he was leaving, "there are so many criminals at large these days."

When he had gone, she gave herself up to a delighted reverie. At last she had found an authentic prototype of her dream lodger. Such a nice boy! Only twenty-one and studious. Of course, she had rented one of her rooms at half its value, but what was money when a young man's soul—and eyesight—were at stake. Besides, he had expressed a desire to help. A vague but comforting offer, that. She must see that he did not overstrain his eyes and drop a suggestion or two about his diet.

His name was Swift—Philip Swift. No kin to the Elias Swifts in Sharleyville, however. But the name had a reliable ring about it. And he was coming in at once. It would be nice to feel that there was a man in the house. He was so solicitous, too. Agreed with her that there must be peace and harmony in the home—which was what she was striving for. And there would be others as charming, eligible for the other rooms!

But for a city of seven million souls of varied mood and color, New York proved peculiarly barren of congenial brother lodgers for the blithely contented Philip Swift. It was not until she had inserted a third advertisement and interviewed a score or so of undesirables, that the reluctant

fates provided a suitable occupant for the front room with the what-not. That he recognized the what-not as such, and commented adroitly on the sheen and luster of a treasured highboy, proved partly his eligibility.

"A charming room! Perfectly charming," he enthused. "There's a clothes closet, I presume."

"Yes, indeed," and she pointed it out.

He sauntered across to inspect it. He was a tall, broad young man with an ingratiating smile and waving light hair. His blue serge suit was scrupulously pressed and he swung his stick with self-confidence.

"Quite exceptional," he said. "And I ought to know. I've lived in any number of furnished room houses in town. But what about the price?"

It invariably disturbed her—this matter of placing a price tag on her benevolent dream.

"Well, you see," she said uneasily, "it's not so much the price as—as other things."

"Ah! I can see you're no New York landlady."

"No," she admitted, "this is a new venture for me. I'm from Sharleyville, Kansas and I—"

"Kansas!" he cried delightedly. "Why, I used to know a chap from out that way—at least I used to know one of his sisters. Lawrence, they came from—her name was Virginia. Pretty, too. She had eyes a bit like yours only not so luminous. Perhaps you knew the family."

She didn't. But it was via this pleasant detour that they eventually came back to the room with the suave young man at the wheel.

"It's a perfectly corking thing to do—you're coming to the city like this and starting a rooming house."

"Lodging house," she corrected gently, "I think it sounds a little more—more—"

"Exactly. Lodgings, then." She could see he was humoring her. "It's a risky business though. And I'll wager you don't get the best price for your rooms."

"Oh, but I—I will—eventually," she said knowingly. "Then of course there are so many deserving young men who can't afford to pay much, I'm afraid."

"But my dear lady," he was smilingly incredulous, "you're not in this business for your health. You mustn't let your sympathy run away with you. Here you are alone—a widow?" She nodded. "It's a hazardous undertaking—outside the question of money. Positively dangerous."

"Oh, no!"

"But it is!" He was quite fierce about it. "New York is swarming with unscrupulous men just ready to take advantage of an unsophisticated little person like you. How do you know you won't get some clever thief in here who'll walk out with your silver some night?"

"But I'm being very cautious," she told him earnestly.

"You can't be too cautious. I know New York."

"You've been here long?"

"A year. I'm with Hodges—secretary to the old man himself."

"Hodges?" she queried politely.

He gazed at her incredulously.

"You must know the name! Hodges! The biggest oilcloth manufacturer in the country. Offices on Broad Street—Hodges Building." He glanced about the room. "But look here, about this room. You ought to get fifteen a week for it."

"Yes, that's what I thought."

"At least that," he said decisively. "It is a charming room. It would suit me exactly."

"Then you must have it," began Amalie, but he interrupted her with a gesture of mock alarm.

"I can't afford it—not possibly. I pay ten where I am and that's about all I can squeeze out of my salary for living quarters. You see," he was taking her into his confidence, "I have to spend a good deal on clothes—old Hodges is a stickler for that sort of thing—and then my other obligations—a man in my position, you understand." He stopped, looked covetously at the what-not and the highboy, sighed. "Of course, I'd like no end to take it. The room I'm in now," he lifted his shoulders significantly, "well—there's not much there to lure a man back to it after a hard day's work."

He left the suggestion there for her to fill in colorfully with pictures of riotous

Broadway nights and permanent waves and contraband liquids. If she could save him from these temptations—

"But you *could* pay ten," she reminded him brightly.

"Oh, yes."

"Then suppose I let you have it for that—"

"But it's a ridiculous price for this room," he protested indignantly and beamed upon her suddenly. "I might take it, though on one condition—that you'll let me help you in any way I can. You see, my taking this room at that price and being here to advise you would result in your doing better on your other rooms. If I could feel that I was being some help to you—some protection—"

"And you would—of course."

"Voilà!" He sighed his relief, took her hand and shook it gently. "I must say it has bothered me—ever since you first began to talk—the thought of your being here alone, exposed to all sorts of unpleasantnesses. Of course, it is criminal to let this room go at that price."

"Oh, no."

"It is!" He was severe. "But I shall move in at once and we must make the others cough up. By the way," he frowned thoughtfully, "is there any one else in the house?"

"Only one other, a—"

"There is then!" She could see that he was none too pleased. "What sort of chap is he?"

"Very nice, indeed," she assured him.

"He's quite a studious young man. Philip Swift, his name is."

"Hum! Swift—don't know the name. Well," he shrugged his resignation, "I'll make it my business to have a chat with him later. I suppose he had references?"

"Oh, yes."

"Can't be too careful," he said. "You'd better let me size up the next one. We must make the house a paying proposition. Oh, by Jove!" He dived into his pocket. "I'll leave this with you—unfortunately I haven't the whole amount with me but you'd better keep this as a deposit—it's good business and I can see you need a little jacking up on that score."

He took the edge off the accusation by smiling benignly down upon her and went off leaving a neat little five dollar bill in her hand. An hour later he was back in a taxi, with a steamer trunk beside the driver and any number of shining leather bags sprawled across with his full name—Carl Howe.

And now, indeed, Amalie felt the unequivocal mistress of a houseful. True, financially, she had not launched her career with any too much brilliance, but she had laid the foundation for a household of exceptional merit. It was on the evening of her second lodger's arrival that Philip Swift knocked timidly at her sitting room door.

"May I come in a moment?"

"Do! I have something to tell you."

He refused the chair she indicated.

"I'm on my way to a lecture," he said, "on '*Realism versus Romance*.' I wanted to thank you for the bulb."

"But, of course, you must have a good light."

He shifted his brief case in grateful confusion.

"I—I certainly appreciate it. And how are things going?"

"That was what I wanted to tell you about—my new lodger."

"Then you have rented another room!"

"He came in to-day—a perfectly charming young man. I'm sure he will fit perfectly into our scheme."

"But—but are you sure he is all right?" The eyes behind the horn-rimmed glasses were anxious. "He may be charming and all that—"

"Oh, but he's quite a gentleman. Exceptional."

"Nevertheless, I wish you had consulted me. You can't tell—"

"Not generally," she admitted; "but in Mr. Howe's case! I'm sure you will like him. I do so want you to be good friends." She was in quite a little rapture at the prospect. "He's not so—so earnest-minded as you, perhaps. But he is charming—very."

Her eulogy did not dissipate his doubt.

"I suppose he had proper references?"

"Oh, excellent! He holds quite a responsible position—secretary to Hodges himself!"

"Hodges!" He looked puzzled.

"But surely you know"—she was incredulous—"the financier; the biggest oil-cloth manufacturer in the country."

He was singularly unimpressed.

"Oilcloth!" he echoed.

"And such a nice looking boy. *That* was why I thought I ought to let him come here. A young man of his charm—alone in New York—well, you know how exposed he would naturally be to all sorts of temptations. I thought if he could have a congenial home atmosphere it would be a—a sort of sanctuary for him." She appealed to her listener for approval. "Then I couldn't help but think of you—what a good influence you would be for him."

Swift was not entirely impervious to the subtle compliment, as his thoughtful frown proved. Still, he was conscious of a latent antagonism toward one whose greatest danger lay in his irresistible attraction for the fair sex.

"Of course, I shall coöperate with you in every possible way," he said portentously. "I hope he appreciates your taking him in like this."

"Oh, he does!" she assured him brightly. "And I knew I could depend upon you—that you would understand my motive."

He went out in that pleasant glow, and, as he opened the front door, collided with a well tailored figure on the threshold. There were mumbled apologies while the two measured each other with covert distrust. Then the studious Philip Swift took his brief case and his horn-rimmed glasses out into the night, and the debonair Carl Howe made swiftly for Mrs. Ladd's sitting room.

She had gone back to her desk and the little budget book in which she planned to column and compute her records, but she welcomed him with equal cordiality.

"I hope I'm not bothering you. I'm just in from dinner. I want to give you this on my room." She took the proffered bills—three ones, they were. "That leaves me owing you two. You see, the expense of getting up here and all that left me pretty well strapped, but I'll square things next week. There's nothing like keeping your accounts correct in a business like this."

His manner was resolute, and Amalie

nodded her entire concurrence and smilingly commended the exemplary impulse.

"Are you getting your room settled? You must let me know if you need anything. I want you to be comfortable."

"Oh, but I am," he said abstractedly; and then: "I just ran into a chap going out. Glasses—brief bag. I wondered—"

"Why, that was Mr. Swift—my other lodger. I had just been telling him about you. He's on his way to a lecture."

"Lecture!"

"On '*Realism versus Romance*'—in literature, you know. He's studying to be a writer. He's a nice young man and—"

"Looks nice," agreed Carl, and laughed shortly—"nice and ladylike."

"But he's really not," she took up the cudgels for the absent one. "He's quite manly, but very serious—and shy, too, I'm afraid."

"He doesn't look much like a paying proposition," he observed. "I suppose, when he came, he gave you references—all that."

"Oh, yes. He makes quite a nice salary, I understand—in a publishing house."

"You got his rent in advance, I hope."

"Yes, indeed," she assured him happily, "and I'm sure you're going to like him. I hope so. I do *so* want you to be good friends, and somehow I feel that you—you are so energetic, so—so buoyant—I feel you will be a good influence for him."

He adjusted his tie with a sort of rueful indulgence.

"Well, of course, I shall do my best—since he's here—and since you ask it," he promised magnanimously.

Amalie went contentedly back to her budget book, only to be lured away a little later by the returning Philip Swift.

"I hope you enjoyed your lecture," she said warmly.

"I did," he admitted; but the eyes behind his thick glasses were anxious. "On my way out I ran into a young fellow—tall, sort of flashily dressed—"

"*That* was Mr. Howe!" she told him gladly.

"Howe! That's his name, is it? He's your new roomer?"

"Lodger," corrected Amalie gently.

"I sort of wanted to speak to you about him. I hope you haven't made a mistake in letting him come."

"But surely I haven't!" She was reproachful. "I don't know what you can mean—"

"I mean—well, he looks to me like a typical jazz hound. All show. Acted as if he owned the place, too."

"Oh, but I'm sure that's only his way," she said soothingly. "A young man as attractive as Mr. Howe—"

"Attractive!"

"Might easily be a bit spoiled," she continued firmly. "But even if that were the case, isn't it all the finer of us to have taken him in? I feel certain he has fine qualities—though he *may* be a little frivolous."

"We-ell"—he was still dubious—"I don't like the fellow's looks, to be honest with you. And of course I feel a certain responsibility toward you. I thought it only fair to put you on your guard."

"And it was most considerate of you—but unnecessary, I think," she assured him sweetly. "And I'm sure you'll feel differently about Mr. Howe when you get to know him."

III.

BUT if the conscientious Philip Swift felt differently when the introduction had been effected, his change of heart was not manifest in his attitude toward his brother lodger. Nor was the irresistible Carl Howe markedly impressed by the sobriety and erudition of Mr. Swift. The depth and intensity of their mutual antagonism was exceeded only by their devotion to Amalie Ladd, who decided generously that their antipathy for one another grew out of their desire to protect her.

She became the loyal champion and defender of each in turn, and while this was something of a strain, her unflinching optimism kept her hope nicely polished. Besides, there still remained the task of tenantry her remaining rooms. And now, she realized, she must not only consider the desirability of the applicant from her own point of view, but from that of her lodgers as well.

Thus she was compelled to reject an

aspiring young musician because, of course, his practicing would interfere with the studious pursuits of the ambitious Philip Swift. Then there was the middle-aged gentleman whose eligibility was unmistakable, but who confessed to the habit of a morning bath. With the fastidious itinerary of Carl Howe in mind, she delivered an enthusiastic brief of the salubrity of the evening bath—but to no avail. And in the end it was her sympathy that prevailed—even over the hampering prohibitions she had assumed on behalf of the Messrs. Howe and Swift. But then Charlie Dew was almost humbly amenable.

"He's just a *dear* boy!" She had summoned them both to her sitting room. "Very simple-hearted—and so young. Only nineteen."

They heard her out breathlessly. The myopic gaze of Philip Swift clung to her anxiously. Carl Howe's lips were pursed in doubt. Amalie felt immensely guilty.

"He's a—*a* wire man, I think it is, with the telephone company. He has to work very hard. I wanted to tell you about him because I so want you to be friends."

Her appealing smile went out to them impartially.

"He hasn't had your advantages," she told them. "He's no doubt of humble origin"—they preened themselves—"but he has ambitions to—to get on, you know."

"A wire man!" Carl Howe smiled as he said it.

"The telephone company gave him a very good recommendation," she assured him earnestly. "It's dangerous, too, quite—he climbs poles, you know—things like that."

"Climbs poles!" echoed Philip Swift.

"What room did you give him?" The debonair Carl spoke briskly.

"The south room—next to Mr. Swift."

"Gracious! I—I *hope* he doesn't snore! That sort of person—"

"Oh, but he's not, really. I mean he's quite refined." Her sense of guilt increased.

"I don't suppose there was any need for you to speak to him about the bath," said Mr. Howe, with dry humor.

"Oh, but there was—I mean I did; and

he seems to be very fastidious about his—his person.” She was growing desperate. “Anyway, he has to keep very early hours. He leaves the house at seven.”

“A sort of day laborer,” mused Carl Howe acidly.

“I’m certain he’s the snoring sort,” Philip Swift decided dismally.

Amalie corralled all her strategic forces.

“But I had to let him come because he’s all alone—an orphan! And he wanted to come so badly—I felt it my duty to befriend him, and it occurred to me that his being associated with you—both of you—would be such a help to him—an excellent influence. I want you to come down for tea to-morrow and meet him.” She clasped her hands raptly. “We’re going to be a happy little family—I feel sure of it.”

Perhaps her certainty on this score was not quite so incontestable at the expiration of the tea hour on the following day. That tea had been in the nature of a double celebration. It marked not only her present definite status as a lodging-house matron, but her emancipation from the severe black and white which she had worn for some three years as a faithful obeisance to the departed Mr. Ladd. But she was glad, after it was all over, that she had worn a bright frock. That frock had proved the only enlivening touch to an affair both strained and dismal—that and the wireman’s hirsute adornment.

Charlie Dew’s hair was a rich pink, with shades here and there verging on orange. He had been the last to arrive. A weather-beaten leather bag was slung across his shoulders, and this he slipped to the floor with a resounding clatter of metal. He acknowledged the introductions to his fellow lodgers by pumping arms fiercely, and took his first cup of tea at one gulp and a second almost as greedily. When Amalie opened the door to summon Victoria for a second pot of hot water, he observed that an electric push button connecting with a bell in the kitchen would save her voice, and offered eagerly to install it for her.

Amalie said how perfectly splendid she thought that would be, and how clever he was to have thought of it, whereupon Carl Howe announced casually that he had wired

his entire house when he had been a child of ten. This won him an approving smile from Amalie, and he followed up his advantage by announcing that a Queen Anne chair in his room needed re-upholstering, and offered his services.

Philip Swift, who had been writhing in silence while his tea chilled, now recalled that the famous English novelist, Lord So-and-so, was to lecture in town presently, and wouldn’t Amalie like to hear him? At the suggestion, Carl Howe made an adroit reference to lectures and hokum that implied a synonym between the two words, and the two regarded each other balefully through the rich haze of Charlie Dew’s black cigar.

When they had gone, Amalie felt a good deal battered—as if she had spent an hour in a handball court. But she rallied in the belief that time would nurture the seeds of peace and harmony she had planted.

Thereafter her days were comfortably crowded. What with the installation of the push button that had its outlet in the kitchen, and the restoration of the Queen Anne chair, a series of innovations took place in the old house that left Amalie a trifle dazed and filled the leisure hours of her lodgers. Then there were the long discussions with Philip Swift on the relative merits of Hauptmann and O. Henry. It helped him, he said, even more than the lectures, to approach the thing through the clear channel of her mind. Amalie was only too glad to convert her mind into a clear channel in behalf of the serious-minded Philip, but it seemed to her, a good deal of the time, more like Brooklyn Bridge at the rush hour, their literary conversations were so beset with interruptions. With the wireman’s accomplishing unprecedented wonders in the matter of lighting fixtures and electrical labor saving devices, and Mr. Howe’s resilvering the ancient mirrors he had unearthed from the cellar, and both of them demanding her constant encouragement and advice, her mental impressions were slightly chaotic.

But on the whole, she was triumphant. Her dream was assuming substantial outlines. The threatened dissension between her youthful lodgers seemed to have van-

ished in the wave of industry that engulfed them. If she had been troubled by the thought that the handsome Carl might be a victim of late hours and dark pastimes, his almost constant presence after office hours reassured her. If she had worried for fear the studious Philip might overstrain his eyes at his evening studies, those fears were dissipated by his faithful loiterings in her vicinity. As for the wireman, his devotion was punctuated by the din of hammer and gimlet and the resounding explosion of burnt fuses. Under his diligent craftsmanship, the walls of Amalie's sitting room became a veritable honeycomb of push buttons, each endowed with its own miraculous mission of contributing to her comfort.

Amalie's appreciation of all this diligent industry was enthusiastic. True, it left but a small margin of her days free for any personal pursuits. The pleasant back sitting room became the rallying point of her three devotees. Wherever she went about the old house, the drone of Philip Swift's voice, or the reverberation of Charlie Dew's hammer, or the brisk persiflage of Carl Howe followed her. There were times when she found this wearing, and reproached herself as a result. She had attained her end. The "home atmosphere" of her advertisement had become a beautiful reality.

IV.

CARL HOWE left the office of the oilcloth magnate one afternoon and took his blithe way toward the house on East Fifty-Third Street. Carl was wearing his navy serge double breasted suit. Blue, he had determined, was Amalie Ladd's preference in the matter of gentlemen's clothes. The soft gray hat that set so jauntily on his handsome head was also a subtle homage to Amalie's sartorial predilections. He took his way up the stairs to the tune of a whistled melody directed hopefully toward the door of the sitting room, and stopped short on the threshold of his own room.

"Well! What are *you* doing here?"

"Hello!" greeted Charlie Dew cheerfully, and poked a ragged red head out of the door of the clothes closet.

Carl's angry gaze took in the room: sinuous serpents of wire lay coiled on the floor; the fusty leather bag was there—spread wide and with its plebeian contents spilling over the rug. Upon the couch lay heaped the contents of the closet—that meticulously selected wardrobe which was the joy of Mr. Howe's discriminating soul.

"I said what are you doing here?" he repeated furiously. "What are you doing in my room?"

"Digging clams," said Charlie gravely. "Can't you see?"

"What do you mean by coming in here when I'm out—dragging those things out of my closet?"

"Not a thing," Charlie confessed, and scratched his head with the hammer in his hand. "I don't mean a thing."

Carl advanced threateningly.

"Answer me, you—you—"

"Count ten before you say it," advised the wireman, and weighed the hammer suggestively. "If you got eyes, you can see what I'm doing."

Mr. Howe glanced redly from the spilled tools to the crumpled garments on the bed.

"Up to more of your darned officious tricks," he sneered, "trying to show how smart you are! Well, that may make a hit with Mrs. Ladd, but I don't want any of your push buttons. Get out!"

"Watch me go," advised Charlie. "And it ain't a push button. This is going to be a cute little light over your beddy so you won't get a wrinkle between those lovely eyes of yours if you want to read in bed."

"Well, you needn't mind—"

"I don't specially," Charlie broke in. "I could put something between your eyes now that 'd—"

"You'll get out of here—quick!"

"Who's going to put me out?"

"I am, you young cub! You're only here on probation, anyway."

"Who said so?"

"I did! Now, get out!"

"What on *earth* is all this noise?" It was Philip Swift speaking from the doorway, coatless, sleeves rolled up, the light of inspiration gleaming through the thick lenses of his glasses. "What is the trouble?"

"None of your darned business," rejoined Carl Howe scornfully, and to Charlie: "Well, are you going?"

Charlie turned pleasantly to the agitated Philip.

"This what-men-are-wearing guy is going to put me out of here—if he can."

"Here I come home and find my room in a mess and this pole climber snooping around—"

"Well, for Heaven's sake, quiet down! You're acting like a couple of ruffians! How can I work?"

"That's right, boy," Charlie advised the enraged Carl, "you must quiet down so the literary light can shine."

The color rose in Philip Swift's pallid cheeks.

"It's outrageous—this conduct!"

"Well, what do you stay and look at it for, then?" asked the enraged Carl, and bore down upon the wireman. "Are you going to get out of here or am I going to kick you out?"

"Better save your shoes, Percy."

"Stop this brawling at once," commanded Philip Swift sternly.

"Are you going?"

"I told you once—"

Carl leaped forward. Charlie Dew swung the hammer in his hand up and backward. It came into smart contact with a narrow panel mirror behind him. There followed the clink and crash of broken glass mingled with a horrified cry of protest from Philip Swift; and into this scene of primitive passion rushed Amalie Ladd.

"Oh! What is the matter? What has happened! The mirror—"

They stood looking at her sheepishly—the white faced Philip; Charlie Dew with the light of battle in his eyes—and hair; the furious Carl. Her benevolent dream in splinters—like the shattered glass on the floor! Philip Swift was the first to rally.

"Come away," he pleaded, "this is too ghastly!"

He took her arm, but she shook him off.

"But what was it? You didn't quarrel!"

"Oh, no," Charlie Dew said pleasantly, "I was just going to teach this two-pair-of-pants-to-a-suit guy a little trick, and the

literary light there was going to be the audience."

"He refused to get out of my room," announced Mr. Howe. "I came home and found him snooping around here—"

"But Mr. Howe! Didn't he tell you? I asked him to fix a light over your couch so that—"

"You—you asked him to!"

"Yes, and he was so obliging about it," Amalie said. "I'm sure he didn't *mean* to mess up your room."

"A brutal exhibition of uncontrol," observed Philip Swift.

"Well, nobody gave you a free pass to the show," the wireman reminded him sentimentously.

Carl Howe was writhing.

"You asked him to—but I didn't know the light was *your* idea!"

Amalie moved swiftly across the room to Charlie Dew, lifted his great freckled hand and gave a little cry of horror.

"And see—this! We must put something on it—it's bleeding terribly."

The wireman's eyes dropped in amazement to the hand she held, and lifted at once in sly triumph to the others. His voice was resigned but doleful.

"It's nothing," he said, "just a scratch."

"But it is more than a scratch! How dreadful! Come into the bathroom! Have you a clean linen handkerchief, Mr. Swift? We must find a disinfectant, too."

She led the injured Charlie into the bathroom. Philip hurried off to his room, muttering unintelligibly. Carl Howe leaned sullenly against the door, glaring balefully over Amalie's shoulder at the outwardly meek but inwardly victorious wireman.

"It's just this sort of thing that is so dangerous," she was saying anxiously as she bathed the wounded hand. "You might get blood poisoning."

"Or, lockjaw," contributed Charlie dispassionately.

"Is it very painful?"

"Oh—I can bear it." He winced as he said it, and Amalie murmured gently:

"Poor boy! Now hold it up—that's it. It doesn't look very deep."

"You can't tell how deep these things are—not at first," Charlie reminded her

gently. "I'm not sure there isn't a piece of glass in it."

"Oh, no—I'm sure it's clean. Now, Mr. Swift—your handkerchief. Are you sure it's linen?"

"I never use anything *but* linen." He was indignant. He had taken the handkerchief nearest at hand, and it had been one of his treasured best.

"There, now," Amalie observed with a sigh, "it's safe from germs anyway."

"But it's still bleeding," Charlie reminded her happily.

Philip Swift was leaning against the door jamb. He was very pale.

"I think if that's all I can do, I'd better go and lie down."

Amalie whirled on him anxiously.

"You're not ill?"

"It's the blood. I always feel like this—always have ever since I was a child—the sight of blood—the very word—"

He swayed slightly and Amalie dropped the wireman's injured hand and hurried to the door.

"Why, my dear boy!"

"It's nothing—a faintness."

"Then you must get to your room. Here—lean on me. You must lie down!"

He rested heavily on her slight shoulders as she led him away. Carl Howe, whose mouth had been working uselessly, strode into his room, slammed the door behind him. The deserted wireman gazed resentfully at Philip Swift's drooping figure.

"Oh, this is dreadful," groaned Amalie; "all this dissension!"

"Brutal," murmured Philip.

"Now you stay here"—she eased him onto his couch—"until I go and get some aromatic spirits of ammonia."

She hurried out, collided with Charlie Dew's hovering bulk.

"It's still bleeding," he announced hopefully.

"You must hold it up," she advised, and hurried down the stairs.

The wireman watched her go and then stepped swiftly to Philip Swift's door.

"Is there anything I can do for you, girly?" he asked solicitously.

The man on the couch opened his eyes, shot a beam of triumph across the room.

"No, thank you," he said.

But Charlie moved closer, extended the bandaged hand stained with a great splash of bright crimson.

"It's still bleeding," he announced casually. "I'm afraid your pretty hankie is all spoiled. It's awful—you can see for yourself."

He waved the hand before the horrified Philip, who turned and buried his face in the pillow.

"Get out of here—you brute!"

The wireman grinned, but the sound of light footsteps on the stairs sent him hurrying to the door. Once there, he turned back to the figure on the bed.

"Blood!" he whispered huskily. "It's bloody, sister!" And to Amalie as she hurried past him he announced in a voice pitched clearly enough to penetrate even the thick down of a pillow: "It's still bleeding—my hand is!" Then he went blithely into his own room and lit a cigarette.

The languishing Philip was drinking the revivifying liquid that Amalie had mixed for him, when Carl Howe thrust his head into the room.

"I—I cleaned up the mess," he announced. "One of my suits is ruined—the broken glass—a big tear in the trousers!"

Amalie lifted her eyes reproachfully.

"Oh, Mr. Howe! You see what a bad temper will do."

"If he'd told me the light was your idea."

"I'm sure he would have if you had given him time. But now—you see what has happened—poor Charlie, poor Mr. Swift!"

"Poor nothing! What about me!" he blurted furiously. "What about my suit—"

"How can you think of clothes at a time like this?"

"How can I think of—of—" For a moment he glared apoplectically about him, then he turned and hurried down the stairs, muttering venomous imprecations against his fellow lodgers.

Amalie half rose to follow him, but a gentle groan from the bed stopped her.

"How are you feeling now?"

"Faint—very faint."

"It's still bleeding," announced Charlie Dew's voice from the doorway.

Her voice was frantic, her eyes harassed.

"You must go and lie down, too. Perhaps I had better dress it again—I'll come in to you presently."

She did. The injured hand was rebanded—with a second handkerchief from Philip Swift's supply. Eleven o'clock found her still tacking a solicitous course between the two rooms. The courageous assurances on the part of the two invalids to the effect that they were quite all right, failed to impress her, since her presence in one room gave rise to a summons from the other.

And at midnight the aggrieved Carl returned. Amalie heard his step, and had a fleeting pang of conscience when she realized that never before had he been out so late. It was when she heard him fumbling for the key to his room that she hurried out into the hall. He stood swaying before his door. The smart gray felt hat was clinging precariously to the back of his head. One end of his cravat dangled outside his vest. He regarded her sadly through half-shut eyes.

"I had to come back," he told her. "I knew you didn't—hic—want me! Nobody"—he was fumbling uncertainly for his handkerchief—"nobody wantsh me! All you care about'sh *them*! That f-freckle fashed p-pole climber an' that sh-shrimp."

He began to weep dismally. Amalie's gaze was wide with horror and remorse. She took the key from him, opened the door and led him gently inside.

"Oh, Mr. Howe, this is terrible, terrible. How could you do it!"

"I drowned my shorrows," he told her, "in gin—it wasn't *good* gin. It was shin—shin—thet—it wasn't good gin. I met a chap. Nice chap. I shaid, 'what 'd you do if nobody loved you?' He said, 'I'd get drunk.' So I did. Clever chap. I never would have thought of it."

She had guided him safely to the couch and turned on the light. Now she took his hat, although he protested indignantly at her waiting on him, and when she insisted, began to weep bitterly.

"Nobody loves me—"

"Hush, you don't know what you're saying, Mr. Howe."

"Call me Carl," he pleaded.

"Please, Mr. Howe—"

"Call me Carl," he persisted tearfully.

"Then I'll know you're not mad be-because I'm drunk."

"I'm not mad, I'm disappointed," she amended.

"It isn't my fault. Itsh that rotten lil pole climber—he came snooping around. You let him—I don't want to lie down."

"But you must. I'm going down to make you some coffee."

"Don't need coffee," he protested. "I need you. You don't like me."

"But of course I do."

"Better'n *them*?" he persisted.

She left him, weeping dismally into a dirty handkerchief, and went down to the kitchen. When she returned with a steaming pot of coffee, he was asleep with the pillow over his head. She took off his shoes and covered him, then she went wearily down to the little back sitting room and locked the door behind her.

V.

DURING the following weeks Amalie Ladd's bright optimism suffered a partial eclipse. Those weeks had imbued her with a faint glow of sympathy for the departed Mrs. Proctor; a faint suspicion that perhaps that determined woman's methods had not been groundlessly heartless. Then, too, the neat little budget book showed a weekly deficit that was appalling. The meager residue of the late Mr. Ladd's bequest was dwindling with horrid rapidity. True, her best room—the parlor floor front with bath—was still vacant. But the necessity for tenanting the vacancy seemed to her so much less hazardous than the task of locating the triply endowed being which her fourth lodger must be that she shrank guiltily from making the effort, and put the thought of the budget book sturdily away from her.

Consequently it was with mingled alarm and amazement that she heard Victoria announce on a crisp winter day:

"A gentleman to ask about rooms, ma'am."

Amalie's heart sank. She had not advertised for weeks. But she was still formulating her refusal to see the "gentleman" when a face loomed above the shoulder of the somnolent maid.

"Are you the person I see?" it asked abruptly.

Victoria gratefully withdrew, thereby giving the face its due of tweed garbed torso and a little more than its due of long, tweed clad legs. The face itself was thin, with a high bridged nose, fierce gray eyes, and a tight, unsmiling mouth. The hat he had jerked off at sight of Amalie disclosed an abundance of iron gray hair not too carefully combed. He looked first at Amalie and then about the cozy room with a sort of furtive belligerence as he fumbled in his pocket and produced a crumpled newspaper clipping.

"I cut this out of a paper some weeks ago," he said, "but circumstances kept me—er—well, is the room still vacant?"

It came so straight that she had no time to dissemble.

"Yes, but—"

"This says"—he tapped the clipping smartly—"gentlemen only.' Does it mean what it says?"

"Yes, of course, but—"

"You have only gentlemen in the house?"

"Yes—"

"Where's the room?"

"In front of this. It has a private bath."

The answer came swiftly, without her volition.

"I'll look at it," he decided.

But her fear of him, savage as he was, was not so great as her dread of adding another warring factor to her ménage.

"It's—it's very expensive," she parried.

"How much?"

"Twenty-five dollars a week," she said desperately.

"I'll look at it," he repeated. "I like the looks of things here."

Amalie realized that it would be scarcely politic to tell him that she could not share his point of view. But she thought of the pugnacious Dew, and the literary light, and

the fastidious Carl. She thought of the added responsibility suggested by this fierce person, and she discarded her conscience.

"It isn't any too well heated. And it's dark, I'm afraid. I don't think it would do for you."

"How do you know it wouldn't?" he barked. "That's for me to decide, isn't it?"

She led the way miserably. He stamped about the room, poked his massive head into the neat little bath, came back to her.

"This will do," he announced. "I'll come right in."

"But I'm not at all sure you're going to like it—and I have to have my money in advance, you know."

He reached for his wallet, not in the least disturbed by this announcement.

"Now, this 'home atmosphere' bunk in your ad—"

"Oh, but that ad—"

"I don't want it," he went on. "I want a place where I shall be left alone." His eyes dropped away from hers furtively. "I may only be here one or two nights a week, but when I'm *here* I want a little peace, solitude."

"But—but"—her voice was thin—"have you references?"

"No," he roared; "but I'll pay a month in advance. I don't answer a lot of darn fool questions. I won't run off with your furniture, you may be sure of that. I don't like furniture. I like books—and a little peace and privacy. I want a place where I can come and go as I please. I won't be questioned. I won't have callers, nor phone calls. If you don't want me on those terms, all right. If you do, just write a receipt for this."

He extended two fifty dollar bills, new, crisp, yellow. Amalie took them mechanically along with the fountain pen and torn notebook leaf he proffered. She wrote "Received from—" and looked up inquiringly.

"Never mind the name," he said. "Just put 'Received for parlor floor front.' You won't have any need for my name."

"I don't," repeated Amalie incredulously, "even have to know your *name*?"

"Why should you? I tell you I won't be bothered."

She looked down at the bills eagerly, wrote the receipt, and handed it back. He started for the door. Once there, his fierce gaze was upon her again.

"You're sure there are no women here?"

"No one but the maid and myself,"

"H-m!" That seemed to dispose of Amalie. "But that maid! If I catch her snooping around my things—I'll—I'll scalp her—see?"

He stalked down the front steps, his very hair bristling aggressively. Amalie was gazing with rapt joy upon the money in her hand. It was a miracle, an incredible miracle. Here was a tenant for the front room whose presence would materially subtract from the deficit column of the budget book and for whom she need not be responsible. The terms upon which he had taken the room absolved her of any moral obligations concerning him—his personal proclivities or ethical codes. He had demanded nothing save the room, and he had paid her own price. She might put him quite out of her mind. It would not even be necessary for the mutinous trio to know of his presence. She had a guilty thrill at the thought, but unfortunately the punctual Philip Swift, coming in at five nine exactly, collided with Victoria, broom and duster laden, coming from the parlor floor front. He set his brief bag on the stairs and went direct to Amalie's sitting room.

"Victoria tells me you've rented the front suite."

"Y-yes," faltered Amalie miserably.

"Well, that's fine!" His eyes shone with paternal approval. "Pay your price?"

"Oh, yes! More than I hoped for."

"Well, well! What sort of chap is he?"

"Oh, very nice—a middle-aged man."

He considered this gravely.

"Sounds good," he decided. "What's his business?"

"I—I don't know."

She felt like a naughty girl caught in the jam closet.

"You don't mean to say you didn't ask?"

"N-no—I'm afraid I didn't."

"But really"—he decided to be in-

dulgent with her—"that's scarcely businesslike, you know."

"I know. Still"—her manner implied, feebly, that it was her own risk—"I'm sure he's all right. He paid in advance."

"Well, I should hope so," said Swift. "His references were good, I suppose?"

"I—well—"

"He gave you references, didn't he?"

She was twisting her fingers miserably.

"No, he didn't. I—"

"Well, by Jove!" The literary light glowed dangerously. "He can't get away with that—here! Trying to take advantage of you just because he thinks you're a woman alone. I'll have to—"

"Oh, but you mustn't do anything," she protested frantically. "He's quite all right. A gentleman, I'm certain. I could tell by his face."

"My dear Mrs. Ladd!" He was like a tried but patient father. "If you knew more of life, you would know better than to judge on such evidence. Now we must—"

"But it doesn't matter what he is. He paid me, you see, and he's only going to use the room once in a while—"

"Once in a while!" Swift was dumfounded. "You mean he isn't going to live in it?"

"Oh, no!" she said happily. "He said he'd only want the use of the room occasionally."

But for some reason this announcement had exactly the opposite effect to what she had expected.

"Good Lord!" gasped Mr. Swift. "This is an outrage!"

"But—but why?"

"Don't you see? He must have his living quarters somewhere else. It's plain on the face of it that he wants that room for some illicit purpose. Sounds to me as if he might be a bootlegger and wanted some place to keep his stuff and take refuge from the police."

"Oh, no!" gasped Amalie.

"It's unmistakable," Philip Swift pointed out. "He comes here—makes no fuss about the price—refuses to give you references, or to tell you anything about himself—"

"I don't *want* to know anything about him!" cried Amalie desperately.

"Well, if you are too sensitive to probe, I'm not!" Swift announced warmly. "I shall see him and—"

But even a mouse, cornered, will turn. If her own fears as to the status of her new lodger had not grown along with his own, she might not have asserted herself. But her very guilt gave her courage. It was her own house, after all, and although the mysterious stranger might be everything that the literary light had implied, he *had* paid.

"But I'm sure you're wrong, Mr. Swift. I know he's all right—quite. He mustn't be bothered. He expressly said he didn't want to be bothered."

"He *did*!" Philip Swift set his thin lips grimly. "Well, that convinces me. Fortunately I'm sensible of my responsibility toward you. You may put this out of your mind. I shall attend to that gentleman!"

With this vague but terrifying threat, he left her. Her lips were set stubbornly and a latent belligerence was in her eyes. But that scene was only the prologue to what was to follow. The debonair Carl was rabid. How he had heard of the mysterious stranger Amalie could not guess.

"It's preposterous!" he cried. "Why didn't you wait until I came home? For all we know, he may be an escaped convict or one of these Broadway bandits looking for a place to hide his loot."

"But I'm certain he's not!" she protested.

"Well, we'll soon find out. He probably thinks you're alone—unprotected. He'll soon know better!"

His exit gave the hovering Charlie Dew his cue.

"My gosh—how do you know he ain't a second story man just getting a layout of the house so he can make a haul here?" he demanded wrathfully.

"But I'm sure he's not!" she said firmly.

"What's the guy's name, anyway?"

"I—I don't know."

"You don't *know*!"

He tore up the stairs, pounded peremptorily on Carl Howe's door.

"She don't even know his name," he announced.

"Who—what—"

"The guy that's taken the front room."

"What's this?" Philip Swift's lean figure loomed in his doorway.

"She doesn't even know his name," Carl took it from the agitated wire man.

"You don't mean—" Philip's face was a mask of horror.

"Nor anything about him," contributed Charlie Dew.

"I suppose he intimidated her," observed Carl thoughtfully.

"She's such a little softy!" the wireman said with a reminiscent smile.

"But it's outrageous!" blurted Philip.

"He can't get away with it," declared Charlie Dew vehemently.

"One of us will have to see him," Carl added importantly.

"Or all of us," appended Philip. "He may be a hardened criminal."

"Yeh," the wireman agreed lightly, "but he's an old boy. She said so."

"But he may have confederates," suggested the cautious Philip.

"I'd like to know when we can get hold of him. He'll probably sneak in and out at all hours," Carl said thoughtfully.

"We'll have to lay for him," predicted the wireman.

"We might inform the police," proposed Philip hopefully.

"But we ain't got nothing on him yet," Charlie reminded him.

"Best thing to do is wait and break into his room some night, get some evidence and then turn him over to the police," Carl Howe decided portentously.

"But in the meantime he might rob the place or break into Mrs. Ladd's room some night and—and murder her in her bed," prophesied Philip Swift with some asperity.

"Thing for me to do," the wireman resolved, "is to put a push button at the head of her bed, connect it with a bell in my room."

"That might protect her at night, but she's all alone in the daytime," Carl remembered anxiously.

"Well, we'll have to sort of keep tabs on the house," Charlie decided.

"I can run in at the noon hour, I think," offered Philip Swift.

"Say," said Carl, with a cautious glance toward the stairs, "you fellows come into my room where we can hash this thing out."

VI.

As the sound of the closing door reached her where she stood at the foot of the stairs, Amalie Ladd turned and tiptoed silently into her own room. The clamor of Charlie Dew's excited summons on the door of the front room with the whatnot had sent her in swift pursuit, thoughts of another bloody battle urging her on. But instead of presenting herself—as had been her wont—as intermediary to the fractious trio, she had remained clinging to the newel post in bewildered alarm.

Now, back in her own quarters, she shook her head incredulously. They were closeted in amicable conference in the haughty Carl's room. But her glow of pleasure at this was succeeded by a chilly terror. They had merged their individual animosity toward each other into a triple-plated broadsword against the mysterious stranger.

With this realization, her championship promptly shifted its objective. Surely if the trio was as assiduous in its pursuit of the guilty as it had been in its protection of the innocent, the new tenant of the parlor floor front would pay for his crimes—if criminal he proved to be. Of course, their sinister suggestions had taken root in Amalie's gentle breast—taken root and borne fearful offshoots.

There was nothing to prove that the fierce and furtive stranger was not a bootlegger, a bandit, or an escaped convict. Indeed, there was much to indicate that he might be any or all of these fearsome things. She could not deny that his manner had suggested that there were dark unpleasantnesses in his life from which he sought sanctuary. But he had, unwittingly, touched a responsive chord when he had made his plea for privacy and solitude—words that evoked in Amalie's memory the vague picture of a half forgotten Nirvana. That had been enough in itself to enlist her sympathy. Now that he was the object

of prosecution, she became his secret ally. She found herself avoiding the reproachful glances of Mr. Howe, blushing under the solicitous gleam thrown out by the literary light. The energetic Charlie Dew's anxiety found vent in an arduously installed electric button that connected by obvious and unlovely wires with a bell at his bed's head.

The mysterious stranger remained mysterious. He remained, in short, practically invisible. Occasionally his rooms showed signs of occupation, and once Amalie was awakened by a bass voice humming the love music from "Isolde." She found a certain comfort in this. Bootlegger or bandit, he was not entirely insensitive to the appeal of finer things. But he timed his entrances and exits with a caution that precluded observation. And this was indeed amazing since the house on East Fifty-Third Street had become a veritable Scotland Yard of diligent sleuths.

It was not long before Amalie realized that she was to suffer almost as much from this campaign of prosecution as its direct object. Since his presence in the house menaced her, the trio reënforced the panoply of protection it had built about her. Whereas, hitherto, her days from nine to five had been blessedly uninvaded, they were now beset with interruptions. Philip Swift formed the habit of dropping in at the lunch hour, inquiring in a hushed voice whether there was any news. The ingenious wireman conceived the idea of telephoning her at all hours, often from the borrowed elevation of some distant pole, blithely impervious to the hazards of his position.

As for the stranger, his comings and goings were a series of hairbreadth escapes from this determined espionage. Amalie's sympathy for him increased. Be what he may, he was a hunted being, and she was pretty certain by this time that she was indeed harboring a criminal. She could no longer deny, even to herself, that the stranger's conduct was that of a person who wished above all else to escape observation. Whenever she met him in the hall—which was not often—he was lugging in some awkwardly wrapped box or package.

It seemed to her that he carried these with the air of a smuggler. Invariably he celebrated his hauls by a sentimental solo in his pleasant bass voice that carried easily to her sitting room.

It was during one of these sinister performances that happened to take place on Victoria's afternoon out, that Amalie went to the door in response to the bell. A woman greeted her curtly and placed a substantial foot on the threshold as she spoke.

"You take roomers, don't you?"

"Lodgers," corrected Amalie politely, "but not women. Gentlemen only."

She was a large young woman in mannish tweeds with a chin that was uncompromisingly square.

"It isn't for myself," she said sternly. "I'm looking for some one—a gentleman. I believe he took a room here recently."

"I have several young men—"

"This is not a young man. He's middle-aged, iron gray hair, tall, wears tweeds mostly. Do you know him?"

Amalie appeared to consider the question earnestly. In reality she was thinking of the fierce but musical stranger and of the aggressive trio, and of baying hounds and a fox at bay—and recklessly allied herself with the criminal world.

"No, I can't say that I do—know him." She felt immensely guilty and immensely triumphant.

"But, my dear madam," protested the resolute woman, "he is known to have taken rooms somewhere on this block, and as this is the only rooming house—"

"Lodging house," corrected Amalie gently.

"—On this street, it stands to reason he must be here."

"It *would* seem reasonable to suppose so," agreed Amalie candidly.

"Well, then!" It was a direct challenge.

"But I really don't know the gentleman."

"But you have his description."

"It was very graphic," admitted Amalie, "still there are so many tall men with iron gray hair—"

"But the man I speak of is exceptionally tall; his hair is thick, wavy."

"He sounds very attractive," Amalie mused thoughtfully. "Personally I like gray hair."

But the woman on the stoop was glaring at her suspiciously.

"You have no one here, then, who answers that description?"

Amalie evaded that nicely.

"Perhaps if you were to tell me his name," she suggested.

But the casual remark had an odd effect upon the questioner. She spoke sharply.

"I guess if you don't recognize him by the description, you wouldn't by his name."

"That's very true," agreed Amalie readily enough.

The severe young woman looked at her for a moment as if her failure to locate the missing gentleman with the iron gray hair were, somehow, Amalie's fault. Then with a curtly muttered "thanks," she stumped angrily down the steps. Amalie closed the door very gently and flattened an inadequate nose against the curtained glass. The mannish suit and square toed shoes had crossed the street and were standing on the opposite pavement glaring resentfully back at the house.

Amalie watched, in a flutter of guilty excitement. The realization that she had become an accessory after—or before—some sinister fact, beat the hot color into her cheeks. Still, she was not sorry and she hadn't lied—not actually.

"Er—ah—ahem, Mrs.—"

She whirled on the voice. A tousled hearthbrush of iron gray hair protruded from the half open door beside her.

"Mrs. Ladd, is the name," she offered helpfully.

"I—I just wanted to say—well, thank you." He said it as a matter of fact, grudgingly, as if impelled by a latent chivalry instead of any overwhelming sense of gratitude.

"You're quite welcome," she began and caught herself up fearfully, "but of course you've nothing—I don't know what you mean."

"You certainly knew she was after me," he accused irritably.

"Oh, but there are so many tall—I mean, I didn't *know* you!"

He looked speculatively at her and a fierce defiance came into his eyes.

"Well, I'm obliged to you, anyway."

"Oh, that's all right," she told him inconsistently enough.

He let himself part way out into the hall.

"And now, you probably think I owe you an explanation," he said contentiously. "That's the way with women—they get you one way or another. But I won't explain—" his voice rose angrily; "I paid for my right to peace and privacy and it's up to you to see that I get it—"

But Amalie's gentle spirit rose up at that.

"I haven't asked you for an explanation," she told him indignantly. "I don't want an explanation. I don't want to know the first little thing about you. I have enough responsibility as it is. If I had to know things about you it would be just that much more to bear and I tell you I won't bear any more. So there!"

She made a rush for her own room, slammed the door behind her, leaving the mysterious lodger gazing after her as if he had just encountered a lively ghost.

Well, that was that, Amalie reflected and was grateful to Charley Dew for the expression. She had had a narrow escape. Another moment and he might have told her all and she would have been forced to shoulder his guilt. He might have told her that he was a murderer and she would have had to turn him over to the police; he might have told her that the money with which he had paid for his room, was stolen and she would have had to give it back. Or he might have confessed that he was starving and she would have had to feed him.

As it was, she told herself stoutly, her defense of him was merely a matter of self protection. He might not be the person the square toed shoes were trailing. Anyway, it was none of her business. His very ambiguity was the most comforting thing about him—that and the fact that their relationship was so beautifully impersonal. She had made no compromises with him out of sympathy and he did not feel that he must "protect" her, as a consequence. The whole arrangement was eminently business-like.

But if Amalie refused to lift the shroud of mystery in which her new lodger had wrapped himself, the zealous trio were not so finical. Despite her spirited admonitions; despite her protests that the blameless conduct of the stranger entitled him to the undisturbed privacy he had demanded, her arguments appeared only to feed their fears. The stranger's conduct *might* be blameless—it was also furtive. She was, they pointed out, in constant danger. It was her right and her duty to exact from him the information he had withheld. If she continued to refuse, the task automatically devolved upon them.

Amalie, trying desperately to regain the foothold of authority her gentleness had cost her, told them that they really mustn't worry. The stranger was a gentleman—she was convinced of it. And if *she* was willing to take the risk of his unexplained presence—well—"She let it hang there significantly while they muttered among themselves.

But it was not until Philip Swift came face to face with the suspect in the hall one evening, that their nebulous animosity took definite form. It was an inadvertent meeting, detailed immediately afterward to Mr. Howe and the wireman by the shaken Mr. Swift.

"The man's undoubtedly a fugitive—a criminal of some sort," he asserted emphatically. "I ran into him, you see—it was quite unexpected—but I spoke civilly enough. He was carrying a bundle—it was carelessly wrapped—"

"Booze, probably," hazarded Charlie Dew grimly.

"Or somebody's jewels!" appended Carl Howe.

"At any rate," Mr. Swift broke in a little resentfully, "I thought it an excellent opportunity to speak with him—give him a chance to sort of justify himself. So I said 'Good evening! I'm Swift, second floor back. I understand you've just joined our little family.' I stood between him and the door, so he had to answer me. Well—he did!"

"What did he say?"

"Make it snappy, bo!"

But the literary light was in perfect fever

of ecstatic triumph and would not be hurried.

"He looked at me for a moment. I assure you there was murder in his eyes. Then he said—'Family be damned!'"

"Well—what else?" demanded Carl Howe impatiently.

"Let's hear the rest," encouraged the wireman.

Mr. Swift's eyes widened in amazement.

"But I've told you all there is to tell. What *could* there be after that!" His tone reproved them. "He brushed past me—I believe if I hadn't moved he would have knocked me down—and went into his room."

"You mean you didn't ask him anything else!"

"Say! Did you let him get away with *that*?" Charlie Dew's fists doubled in vicarious resentment.

"Naturally, I didn't say anything further! How could I?" Philip queried plaintively. "The man's face is murderous—"

"It'd been something besides murderous if he'd answered me like that," the wireman murmured grimly.

"And *you'd* have been locked up for assault," commented Carl Howe judicially. "No, Swift is right. We'll have to go about this thing carefully. His manner certainly bears us out in—"

"He's positively the ugliest customer I've seen in a long time," reminisced Philip.

"You say he was carrying a bundle?"

"Sort of square it was. Done up in newspaper."

"Gin," guessed Charlie Dew promptly. "He's a bootlegger."

"Thing for us to do is to get into that room," Carl decided. "Victoria's got a pass key. Dew here can take the impression and have another one made."

"That's the ticket!"

"But he might be in!" The literary light paled.

"He's seldom there two nights in succession," Carl pointed out sagely. "Say we pull the stunt to-morrow night."

"But Mrs. Ladd! She won't permit—"

"She won't know! One of us will stay with her, the other two search the room."

"It's a criminal offense—breaking into a man's room," Mr. Swift reminded them anxiously.

"But unless he *is* a criminal, he needn't know anything about it," argued Carl. "If we don't find any incriminating evidence, there will be an end of it. If we *do*—we'll call in the police to make the raid."

"I got a friend on the force," the wireman offered eagerly. "I can wise him up."

It was a plan worthy of the adroit intriguants behind it. Charlie Dew shouldered the responsibility of the pass key. Brought it snugly home the following evening. And it was Charlie and the intrepid Carl who undertook the investigation of the stranger's room while to Philip Swift fell the less hazardous, if more delicate, feat of engaging the unconscious Amalie in conversation during the performance.

It was after eight when the trio tiptoed down the stairs in awful silence which was broken by the wireman's husky whisper:

"There's no light there. Come on, bo!"

VII.

AMALIE was making a little circle of turgid roses on a potential bureau scarf, her head bent at a politely attentive angle toward the effulgent literary light, when the unceremonious but dramatic entrance of her remaining two lodgers brought her to her feet.

"We've got him with the goods!"

"It's all right! He's not there!"

"But the loot is!" gloated the frantic Charlie.

Mrs. Ladd's hands flew to her throat.

"Loot! You've got who?"

"That crook! Your roomer!" roared the wireman.

"Lodger," corrected Amalie mechanically. "You mean you've caught *him*!"

"With the goods," nodded Carl Howe eagerly.

"The place is full of stuff!" The wireman's frenzy seemed to have communicated itself to his hair. It stood up in ragged tufts and sent forth the glow of an incipient forest fire.

"You mean you broke into his room," faltered Amalie incredulously.

"With a pass key," supplemented Carl Howe firmly. "We've suspected him from the first, you see—"

"We had his number all right. The loot is there—"

"Oh, but you shouldn't have! How do you know the things have been stolen!"

"She's coming to identify it!" cried the wireman triumphantly.

"She—who?"

"The woman who—"

"Now just a moment you two," broke in Philip Swift severely. "Can't you see you are frightening Mrs. Ladd?" He patted her hand reassuringly. "You're muddling the thing horribly. You say you found stolen goods?"

Charlie Dew opened his lips, but the determined Carl spoke first.

"One of the boxes had a name on it— and address. I waited while Dew went out, looked it up in the directory and telephoned—"

"I got a woman" the wireman took up the story, "asked her if she'd been missing anything lately—antiques, jewelry, and she said yes. I told her where we were and she's coming to identify them."

"Then he is a thief!" gasped Amalie.

"Fence, probably," contributed the wireman. "You know—the guy who receives the stuff, keeps it until the cops get careless and sells it."

"Come in and see for yourself," urged Carl Howe.

With Philip's gently supporting hand on her arm, she followed the triumphant wireman and the portentous Carl Howe to the parlor floor front. The room was ablaze with light and the fervid machinations of the self appointed detectives had left typhonic chaos in its wake.

"You see—here!"

"And this!"

A pair of exquisitely embossed silver military brushes! A jewel case crypting a plump gold watch.

"Priceless," breathed Philip Swift. "An antique—you see the key!"

"And these!" Carl Howe came forward with further evidence.

"They don't look like much to me," admitted the wireman sourly.

Amalie peered unhappily at the box they held out for her inspection, formless bits of bone and mineral meticulously tagged and numbered.

"But what are they?" she demanded.

"That's the box we found the name on—"

"Fossils," Philip Swift was explaining authoritatively. "They are immensely valuable. Probably from some famous collection."

"But—but these things may be his."

"Only they ain't," Charlie Dew said grimly. "You'll meet the owner soon. She's on her way."

"Oh, but how *could* you!" Amalie appealed to them in her despair. "Why didn't you let him alone?"

Philip Swift spoke gently.

"It's like you to want to befriend him—even now. But you see when you told me about him, I was afraid you had made a mistake. I knew there was something strange about him."

"*You* knew!" interrupted Carl Howe with elaborate sarcasm.

"Be good enough not to interrupt me," said the literary light frigidly and turned back to Amalie. "And, as I was saying—"

"That's about all you do is 'say,'" broke in the wireman scornfully. "If I'd had my way, the darned crook'd be doing time by now—"

"And a pretty mess you'd have made of it," Carl Howe blurted disgustedly. "Instead of having a pass key made, doing the thing quietly—"

"Well, who got the pass key?" demanded the wireman furiously.

Carl Howe shrugged a contemptuous shoulder and turned to Amalie, found the lean bulk of the literary Mr. Swift intervening.

"Now, if you had consulted me," he was saying gently, but Charlie Dew's disdainful laugh cut him short.

"Oh, I suppose if she had consulted *you*, you'd have told the crook to go away from here! *Yes*, you would!"

"This is a matter between Mrs. Ladd and me," Philip Swift said haughtily. "But since this has happened, I advise—"

"Oh, I guess Mrs. Ladd can manage with—"

out your advice, Swift," hazarded Carl Howe easily. "Unfortunately the whole thing is my fault. I came here for the express purpose of preventing this sort of thing—"

"Then you assumed an unnecessary burden," the literary light told him politely. "It was my duty to supervise Mrs. Ladd's affairs—"

"You flatter yourself," sneered Carl Howe. "If I hadn't decided to look into this thing—"

"You decided!" roared the wireman.

"I notice your hearing is excellent," Carl observed pleasantly.

"But you both know that it was really I who made the decision," Philip said witheringly. "After I had met him in the hall last night—"

"Oh, you met him all right and had a nice little chat with him," admitted Charlie Dew, "and of course your teeth were chattering because you were chilly. If I'd met him—"

"Oh, if *you* had met him," broke in the exasperated Carl, "you would have used those fists of yours—"

"That's more than you or sister, here, would have done!"

"Are you calling me a coward?" demanded Carl furiously.

"If you want to think so, Percy!"

"By Jove, I'll—"

"For Heaven's sake," remonstrated the literary light, "if you two must fight—"

"You keep out of this, girly," advised the wireman kindly, "or you may be seeing more blood, and maybe there ain't any more ammonia in the house!"

"Oh, please, please!" Amalie raised her hands imploringly, backed away from them, her eyes wide with terror.

Philip Swift hurried to her side, righteous indignation pinking his pallid cheeks.

"My dear Mrs. Ladd! I'm so sorry this has happened. But I've been fearful of it right along. These two—they're not worthy of the kindness you have shown them. You must put them out!"

The two belligerents whirled at the words. Carl Howe moved across the room, took Amalie's arm masterfully.

"You egotistical puppy! Who do you

think you are, anyway? I'm here to protect Mrs. Ladd. I've only stood for you because she was sorry for you! The sooner you get out—"

"You've only stood for me," echoed the literary light derisively, and took firm possession of Amalie's free arm. "Why, it was I who agreed to let you stay when Mrs. Ladd consulted me about you. It's you who'll go!"

Amalie's frenzied gaze seesawed between them, the pale and indignant literary light, the purposeful Carl—her voluntary protectors.

"Oh, how can you! Please—"

"Say the word and I'll chuck 'em *both* into the street," offered Charlie Dew eagerly. "I never did like 'em!"

She shook herself free. There was a hot rebellion in her mild blue eyes as she opened her lips, but it was another voice that filled the room.

"What the devil does this mean?" In their absorption they had quite forgotten the mysterious stranger—his guilt—the incriminating evidence they had disinterred. They gazed at him stupidly. "How dare you break in here! Who's been pawing over my things! What do you mean by it! I'll—"

But Charlie Dew, recovering first, leaped across the room with a suppressed cry of triumph, laid hold of the tall figure, pinioned his arms, roared to Carl Howe:

"Lock the door, then frisk him while I hold on!"

For a moment the face beneath the rich mop of iron gray hair was almost comically blank. Quiescent in the wireman's iron grip, his eyes took in the room, the muddled bed, the overturned waste basket, the half-open bureau drawers spilling their contents, the precious box of fossils. He gave vent to a yell of rage that tore at the substantial walls and set the bric-a-brac on the mantel dancing.

"So that's the kind of a place you run, is it? A den of crooks!" The accusation was flung at the cringing Amalie. "Got me in here to rob me, did you? You—"

"Better keep your trap shut," advised the wireman belligerently. "We've got you with the goods!"

"He's unarmed," announced Carl.

"Don't tote a gun, eh?"

"Damn you! If I'd had a gun—"

"Come away from here!" Philip Swift laid a protective arm across Amalie's shoulders. "You can't listen to this—"

"Can't listen to it, can't she?" roared the stranger. "Too soft hearted, is she, to see you do her dirty work." He fought desperately against Charlie Dew's restraining grip. "That's the funniest joke I've heard in a long time!"

But Amalie wriggled herself free. Her voice rose shrilly.

"It isn't my dirty work. I had nothing to do with it! They came in here themselves. Against my will! I didn't care if you were a thief—or a murderer—or a bootlegger! I didn't care what you were so long as you let me alone! I didn't want to know anything about you! I don't ever want to know anything about anybody again! I didn't want you to take the old room, anyhow, but you *would* have it!"

"My dear Mrs. Ladd!" protested the agonized Philip, but she flared on him.

"I'm not your dear Mrs. Ladd! I told you to let him alone. I had enough to bear without this. I wanted to make a real home for you! I put it in my advertisement—'home atmosphere'! I was sorry for young men who had to live in lodging houses—with nobody to look after them!" She turned to the stranger. His mouth had dropped open. "I let them have my rooms cheap—to help them. But they didn't appreciate it. They have been quarreling ever since—making my life miserable. This is all their fault. I tried to prevent it. I don't care one little darn who you are! You should have gone to a regular rooming house where people mind their own business! But you would come—and now you're found out!"

She only stopped then because her breath was coming so short and sharp. But she glared at them with impartial resentment. The mutinous trio were gazing at her incredulously. The mysterious stranger's apoplectic rage was overlain with sudden bewilderment.

"Well, it was your house!" he faltered. "You should have stopped 'em."

"It—it wasn't my house! It never has been my house since they came here!"

"We—we only wanted to protect you!" stammered the literary light weakly.

"Protect me! I didn't want to be protected! Look what you've done!"

"But we got him. He's a crook," insisted the wireman wonderingly. "You didn't want a crook in your house, did you?"

She flung out her arms. "I didn't care, I tell you! He let me alone!"

"But damn it, I'm not a crook!" roared the stranger, the accusation reviving his wrath. "These things are mine, you interfering fools!"

"Sure they are," said the wireman grimly. "But tell the judge that!"

None of them had heard the bell, but a staccato summons on the panels of the locked door brought an excited yell from Carl Howe.

"Here she is! Hold him, Dew, while I open the door!"

Amalie gave an abortive squeal of protest as the door flung open. It was the tweed suit and the square-toed shoes and the uncompromising chin. Amalie recognized her at once, and shuddered a little at the resolute light in those cold gray eyes as they rested accusingly on the mysterious stranger.

"Well! This is a nice mess! What does it mean?"

"He's the guy who stole your stuff—"

"It's here, you see," Carl Howe announced unctuously.

But the gaze of the resolute woman had not wavered from the face of the mysterious stranger.

"What does this ridiculous situation mean?"

The stranger was wagging his head from side to side in an excess of inarticulate rage.

"Mean! That's what I want to know! What did you follow me here for—trail me as if I was a nitwit! How did you find out—"

"One of these young men phoned me. They described your things! Naturally I concluded that you would be where your precious fossils were! It's outrageous! I might never have found you!"

"You bet your boots you wouldn't!"

"But, my dear father! What absurd conduct—a man of your age—traipsing off and renting a room when you have a perfectly good home—a family!"

Fortunately there was a chair near Amalie. She dropped gratefully into it. The wireman's grip on the stranger relaxed, his hands fell away. Philip Swift took off his glasses and wiped them carefully.

"Home!" roared the stranger. "Family! That's just it! They were driving me insane. I wanted a place where I could call my soul my own! I'm sick and tired of being told when to get up and when to go to bed! I haven't had a minute's peace since all you know-it-alls began coming home from college—telling me what to do and how to do it! I don't want to eat prunes in the morning! I loathe 'em! And calories—and those what-do-you-call-em's—vitamines! I got along nearly fifty years without the things and I'm darned if I'll eat 'em now. I had to get away or go nutty. I'll come and go when I want to, do you hear? I won't be bullied by a lot of officious women!"

She drew herself up majestically, looked with ineffable scorn about the room.

"Then he ain't a crook?" ventured Charlie Dew miserably.

Though he towered head and shoulders over her, she seemed to look down upon him from an immense height.

"And who are you?" she inquired pleasantly. "One of father's new friends?"

"No, he isn't," bellowed the stranger; "he's another one of your clan. Hasn't learned to mind his own business!"

Her contemptuous gaze wandered to Amalie.

"And of course, since *you* are in this business for money, you would naturally aid and abet my father in this absurd conduct."

Amalie struggled to her feet, her cheeks flaming, but her defense came from another quarter.

"She does nothing of the sort," said the stranger hotly. "She didn't know the first thing about me until to-night. She didn't even *want* me to take the room."

The square-toed shoes made purposefully

for the door. Once there, they turned, and Amalie felt the sharp saber of that accusing glance boring through her, before it shifted to the rebellious stranger.

"Under these circumstances, father," she announced awfully, "we shall have to wash our hands of you!"

"Thank God!" he murmured fervently.

When she had gone, there was a swift interchange of uncertain glances between the three combative lodgers. They seemed strangely depleted as to words, and it was the literary light who assumed the rôle of spokesman.

"This—this is very unfortunate," he observed feebly. "I regret that you misinterpreted our intentions. I assure you—"

"You needn't mind," interrupted the fourth lodger vigorously, "I'm sure she doesn't want to hear your explanations. This is my room, anyhow—and I'm in no mood to hold a reception. Good evening!"

They sauntered out, a sorrowful processional of frustrated philanthropy—of unlaundered chivalry. As the door closed upon them, Amalie turned timidly to the stranger.

"I—I'm very sorry your room is so—so muddled. I'll send Victoria."

"Oh, I don't mind," he told her gruffly, "muddles don't bother me as they do the girls."

"I expect your daughter *is* particular," ventured Amalie gently.

"Three of 'em," he corrected. "I have three daughters—all heavyweights. Brainy, you know. Ever since my wife died—it's been awful!"

"Three," she echoed with a polite show of interest. "Still, it is rather nice, their being intellectual."

"Oh, intellect is all right once in a while—but for a steady diet—" He shrugged his shoulders, looked reflectively at her for a moment. "You should have known better," he accused irritably.

"Known better?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Than to let those kids run over you like this."

"But I wanted them to be happy. I tried to make a home for them."

"Sure you did, and you succeeded," he

said grimly. "That's why you haven't had any peace."

"But I thought it was my duty," she justified herself anxiously; "the rooming houses I saw when I was looking for one—they were dreadful places. So cold—so impersonal."

"That's why people like 'em," he told her. "If they wanted this home atmosphere of yours they'd stay home."

"I never thought of that," she admitted miserably.

"Take me for example, I have a home, all right, but I've been trying to break away for years. There's something demoralizing about the thing—tell folks to make themselves at home and they begin telling you how to run your business."

"Those push buttons," remembered Amalie dismally, "I never did want them."

"Those girls—just because they're my daughters they think they can treat me as if I were a mental defective."

"I put those old mirrors down cellar on purpose," confessed Amalie.

"You've got to keep people in their places," he averred.

"And they were so jealous of each other. I wanted them to be like brothers."

"Sounds like you had your wish," he said waggishly.

"I shall never do it again!" she told him emphatically. "I would starve first."

"You don't mean to say you're going to give up the house just when I'd begun to get comfortable!"

"But I thought—do you mean that you would stay?"

He grinned boyishly.

"Stay, I've just staged my insurrection! You wouldn't put me out *now*!"

"Well," she was lost in thought, "of course I shouldn't like to—"

"But you'll get rid of those three young pups!" Though he gave it a lifting inflection it was more of an assertion than a query.

"I—I expect they'll go now, anyway."

"Don't you believe it. They won't go unless you send 'em. They're in love with you!"

She looked up swiftly, cheeks dyed in red.

"Oh, no! That isn't possible."

"See it with half an eye," he contended. "That's another danger you exposed yourself to. You're young—attractive—they probably thought you wanted 'em to fall in love with you."

"Oh, *no*!" she protested faintly.

"You never should have taken up this business," he told her crossly; "you're not aggressive enough. You need somebody to sort of look after you, protect you."

She dropped her eyes. It was a pleasant word, vaguely familiar.

"Now I'll stay on here. You get rid of those young whelps. Too many of 'em anyway."

"The house isn't very large," she admitted meekly.

"It's large enough if there's not too many in it," he said. "And look here. I've always meant to apologize to you for speaking like that—the day my daughter came snooping around here."

"Oh, but I understood. You needn't—"

"But I do," he persisted sternly. "I apologize. I was very grateful to you."

"I'm afraid I wasn't very polite," she recalled thoughtfully. "But I was so upset, you see."

"Quite natural, too," he said heartily. "If I'd known how matters stood, I'd have taken a hand and settled those young pups myself."

If there was any inconsistency lurking in this announcement, the grateful Amalie failed to discern it.

"Well," she smiled, "I've learned my lesson. After this, I shall keep things on a purely business basis."

"Good!" he approved. "You have to be on your guard with people like that. Give 'em an inch, they'll take an ell. Like my own family. I've asserted myself once and for all. I'd like to see any one boss or dictate to me now!"

"It's the only way to keep one's self respect," Amalie concurred stoutly.

"By the way." He smiled friendly down upon her. "My name's Kristy—Samuel Kristy—maybe you've heard of my collection—I collect fossils."

"Oh, do you!" she cried eagerly. "I've been wondering—"

"I've some fine specimens." He drew the box of "loot" toward him. "If you're interested in these—"

"I am, indeed," she assured him.

He jerked forward a chair.

"Sit here," he commanded, "now these—"

"Just a minute," cautioned Amalie, "until I move the light. You mustn't strain your eyes!"

Upstairs in the front room with the what-not, a few evenings later, three rudely unhorsed knights sat puffing moodily on cigarettes from a common store. Smoke filled the room—smoke and silence and lurking disenchantment.

"What does yours say?" inquired Charlie Dew, gazing sulkily at the neatly inscribed sheet of note paper in his hand.

"They're all alike," Carl Howe said scornfully. "Mine says she's sorry, but she finds unexpectedly that she will need my room. Just like yours, see?"

They compared notes gloomily.

"Women," observed Philip Swift sentimentally, "are—as a sex—notoriously unoriginal."

"It's the old boy's work," Carl Howe sneered. "He's running the place now. I expect she'll marry him. They're always mooning around together."

"She must want to start a home for the aged," the wireman said morosely.

"Oh, I expect there isn't so much difference in their ages," Carl hazarded lightly. "She probably looks a lot younger than she is."

"She'll never see thirty-five again," decided the wireman.

"Forty, I should say," amended Carl.

"Ingratitude," mused the literary light, who had been assiduously perusing the "To Let" advertisements in the evening paper; "ingratitude is an outstanding characteristic of her sex. Moreover, all women are opportunists. Look!"

They followed his gaze through the window. Amalie and the mysterious stranger were taking a leisurely way toward Fifth Avenue. She looked very small and appealing clinging to the tall man's arm. The stranger's carriage was almost arrogantly gallant, and he wore his soft hat at a jaunty angle.

"Opportunists," repeated the literary light thoughtfully. "But it is inherent. We mustn't be too hard on them. She probably used the phrase innocently enough, but any psychoanalyst would trace it easily—"

"Trace what?" asked the wireman impatiently, his eyes still on those two amiably strolling figures in the dusk.

Philip ran his long finger down the "Furnished rooms" column. The bending heads of his two confreres spelled out the words he indicated: "Gentlemen Only."

THE END



TO ANY MAN

ARE you worth
This pain? This living
Agony?
This ceaseless giving?

Giving time and thought and mood
With surliness for gratitude?

Are you worth it? No, no, no!
That is why I love you so!

Mary Carolyn Davies.



The Man Who Mastered Time

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "The Girl in the Golden Atom," "The Fire People," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

WHILE experimenting in their laboratory, Loto Rogers and his father, scientists, discover that time, like space, may be traversed. Loto sees in some future time far distant a girl held captive in a small, white house in a snowy, desolate region. He realizes that this is a part of New York at some time when the peak of civilization has been passed and the world is returning to barbarity.

Continuing his experiments he succeeds in constructing a machine by which he may navigate the future. Starting from the roof of the Scientific Club, he disappears from the sight of Lylda Rogers, his mother, his father, and his friends, as his machine darts into future time. He is bent on the rescue of the girl. Below him Loto sees New York grow into a wonder city; then, two thousand years hence, he witnesses decadence and the tumbling of the giant buildings under the hand of war and of neglect. His dials indicate that he has traversed forty-five thousand years before he realizes that he has gone too far. As he halts his time velocity he is attacked by sensations that make him dizzy.

CHAPTER IV (continued).

THE GIRL CAPTIVE.

"I DO not think I lost consciousness," Loto continued, "my senses reeled for what seemed an age, but was doubtless only a second or two. I fell into a chair,

with my face down in my crooked arm. The horrible dizziness passed; I raised my head and looked about me.

"My first impression was of the extraordinary solidity of the cabin interior. I had not realized how shadowy it had been before. Two little electric bulbs were burn-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 12.

ing overhead. They illuminated the compartment. The windows were black rectangles; it was night outside.

"I was cold; I could see my breath in the chill of the room, even though one of the electric heaters was in operation. Everything close to me was oppressively silent; the humming still seemed to persist vaguely, but I knew it was only the reaction from it roaring in my ears. And from the next compartment came the drone from the Frazia helicopter motors.

"When I had fairly recovered normality, I went to the nearest window. The sky was blue-black. There was no moon; the stars seemed a trifle hazy. Beneath me I could make out a barren expanse of snow. I was blowing swiftly to the southward."

"How could you tell the direction?" the Big Business Man interrupted. "You couldn't see any familiar conformation to that landscape at night, could you?"

"No, sir. But I had a compass. Its needle had steadied now, and I saw that my drift was almost directly south. I was alarmed. I knew that, even with the compass, I could easily get lost—geographically, so to speak.

"My first action was to increase the revolutions of the helicopters and ascend. When I was up some six thousand feet I shut them off, folded the helicopter propellers, and went into a glide. A moment more and I was flying—back northward, against the wind.

"I was hopelessly lost—both in time, and in space. I could distinguish nothing in the starlit, snowy landscape that seemed familiar. Whether or not I had passed the time world I was seeking, I had no idea.

"I flew low, skimming the snow no more than a hundred or two feet above it. There were houses! Huts would be a better word. I think they were built of snow—I could not tell. It seemed an Arctic world."

"You went too far. You passed the girl's world," Georgie said eagerly.

"Yes. I decided to stay near there until morning. Fortunately that proved only a short time away. Within half an hour the east began to brighten. The stars paled; twilight came and passed, and the sun rose—a huge, red, glowing ball.

"I was circling about, quite high—six or eight thousand feet possibly. By this reddish light of early morning I could see the bay south of me. There was no Long Island; the ocean had closed in to the north and east, and I was near its shore—a cold, snowy beach, with lazy rollers. But west of me there was a river—the Hudson, I was sure—a river double the breadth of the one I had known. It seemed to come from a mountainous region in the northwest, and an arm of it north of Manhattan emptied into the sea.

"Everywhere was snow. The bay was full of floating ice. Across the river was an area of stunted trees. I was over Manhattan Island, I was sure. I circled around, searching. It was not the time world I was seeking—that was obvious. Should I go on—or back through the centuries I had passed? I decided on the latter.

"I had now been away from you nearly sixteen hours. I was worn out. I flew across the river, found a level plateau to the north. There was no sign of human habitation in the vicinity. Shutting off my Frazia motors completely, I descended, and came to rest on the surface of the snow, in a time world forty-six thousand and eight years beyond our present. I ate a little, and dropping to the floor of the cabin, fell asleep."

"Wasn't that rather unwise?" the Doctor suggested. "Suppose some inhabitants of that time world had come upon you sleeping there?"

"Yes," Loto agreed. "But I had to take the chance. Even with the abnormally large reserve tanks of my Frazia plane, I had not enough petrol to run the motors more than a hundred hours. I could not afford to waste it."

He shrugged.

"At all events, I awakened without having been disturbed. It was night again. I had slept some twelve hours. I flew upward, back over Manhattan Island—and threw the opposite Proton current into its first intensity.

"I need not go into further details, gentlemen. My sensations were the same as before, though they bothered me less, as I grew more accustomed to them. I came

back through time. At intervals I would stop and examine the landscape.

"The wind was blowing almost continually from the north during all these centuries. But I was not using the helicopters, and I flew into it slowly, keeping my approximate position without great difficulty. I tried to hold myself near the south center of the island, and look northward. I was right in going back through time, I soon discovered. From close to the ground where I stopped once, I could see a rolling hill near by that had a familiar contour. I cannot describe it to you, gentlemen, but once I saw it from that angle, I knew it was in the landscape we had seen from the laboratory.

"Then I found the tree. There was no house. No snow either, for I had chanced then to stop in a summer season. The tree was too small. I chose a ten years later time world, and watching the dials closely, descended at a ten and a half year later period. I had struck it exactly—within a week or two it must have been from the time world father and I had observed."

There was a stir among Loto's little audience. Georgie sucked in his breath sharply.

"Oh! And then you—"

"I had occupied some eight hours with this search. The dials had stopped now at twenty-eight thousand two hundred odd years. I was at that instant flying at an altitude of no more than a few hundred feet. It was again early morning; just after sunrise—that familiar, snowy landscape father and I had seen from the laboratory.

"The house lay below me, with its inclosure and outbuildings; I circled over it, staring down through the floor window. The Frazier motors are greatly muffled, as you doubtless know, but even so their sound carried down to the house. A figure came out into the inclosure, and stared upward at me. It was the girl—in a fur garment, but bareheaded—watching my plane. Before I could think what to do, three huge dogs—each of them the size of a pony—came leaping from one of the outbuildings and stood in a group, baying up at me with snarling voices of such volume and power that they made my blood run cold.

"I was circling slowly over the house, cursing my lack of caution and still too confused to do anything, when the figure of a man appeared in the inclosure—a man in furs and bareheaded like the girl. He stood head and shoulders over her. Evidently the noise of the dogs blotted out the sound of my motors. He did not look up into the air, but striding angrily to the girl, struck her with the flat of his hand full across the mouth. Then he dragged her cowering into the house."

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST ENCOUNTER.

"I HAD straightened out, and was flying south. The howling of the dogs died away. Without realizing where I was going, I headed down the wind. Soon I was over the water. I had risen, and in the morning light could see the landlocked bay into which the main channel of the Hudson emptied; the bay itself had an entrance to the sea almost at the river's mouth.

"It was midwinter, I afterward learned. The river and the bay both seemed frozen over with a mantle of snow on their ice. I passed above an island—Staten Island, no doubt—and mechanically swung to the west.

"What was I to do? I had several rifles in the plane, as you know—and one of the latest Collinger hand guns. My instinct was to land at the house boldly, overawe its inmates with my weapons, and carry off the girl. That was a fatuous thought. I very soon realized that for all I knew they might have the power to strike me dead with some weapon totally unknown.

"I was still flying west. I found myself far out over Jersey, and still I had decided nothing. There were houses beneath me—even a little village or two—white, and blending with the landscape. But I did not heed them, though fortunately I had sense enough to ascend to a high altitude where I could escape observation.

"The sun was rising above the sea behind me, and at last I swung about to face it. As it mounted higher—it was moving at about

normal speed—some of the red, glowing look was lost; it assumed more its familiar aspect of our own time world. But still an hour above the horizon as it was now, I could stare at it quite steadily without being blinded."

"I wanted to ask you about that sun," the Big Business Man began. "Is it your idea that the change of climate—"

"Not now," the Banker objected. "For Heaven's sake—"

"I was heading east," Loto resumed obediently. "In another ten minutes I would have been back over Manhattan."

"Abruptly a course of action came to me. I would leave the plane secluded somewhere and approach the house on foot—quietly. If I could only elude the dogs—not arouse them—I hoped to be able to get into the house and get the girl out. Once I could get her outside and back to the plane. Yes, *mamita*, it was a foolhardy plan. I realize it now. I know I should not have risked such an attempt."

"I flew very low up the Hudson from its mouth. I was afraid I might be seen. Then it suddenly occurred to me how easily I could avoid that for a certainty. I threw the switch of the Proton current into the first and then the second intensity; and began a slow time flight forward through the day simultaneously with my flight up the river."

"I found a good hiding place for the plane, on the east bank of the river—a broad, flat sort of gully some two hundred feet wide—I figured this was about abreast of the house—and I lowered the plane into it with the helicopters. It was difficult to do because of my southward drift, but I managed it. As I neared the ground I shut off the Proton current and came to rest in time and space almost together."

"The sun was just setting behind a line of hills across the river. I had not eaten for several hours; I sat in the cabin now and ate, planning exactly what I should do to rescue the girl."

"You will not understand it, gentlemen, but as I sat there alone, with no one to consult, it did not seem to me so desperate an enterprise. My Collinger—no bigger

than your hand—would fire soundlessly and smokelessly a dozen bullets in as many seconds, each capable of killing a human, or one of those dogs."

"It was the dogs I was most afraid of. And yet—I had observed from the laboratory—they did not run loose about the grounds at night, but were trained to stay in the kennel, which was some distance from the dwelling. Three or four hundred feet perhaps."

"I decided to start about midnight. My clock gave a totally different hour, of course, from the correct one of that particular time world. But I was planning to leave the plane about six hours after sunset."

"It was a long evening, but the time finally arrived. I put on my fur coat—one with the fur outside—and went bareheaded. Why? Because I wanted to look as rational to the girl as possible. She would be afraid of me at best—a stranger—doubtless more afraid of me than of her captors. I realized fully what a difficulty that would be. An outcry from her—resistance on her part—might lose me everything."

"Wouldn't blame her a bit," murmured the Big Business Man. "A man dropping from nowhere to carry her off—"

"Yes, sir," Loto agreed gravely. "But my intentions were the best, though she could not know it. Her attitude would be, perhaps my greatest difficulty—and that is why I wanted my general appearance to be as near like the men of her own time world as possible."

"I left the plane. Besides the Collinger, I had a hand compass, and a small electric torch."

"It was very cold. I scrambled out through the snow, up the side of the gulley to the level land above—a climb of sixty or seventy feet."

"The snow was deep, with an underlying surface of snow or ice that would support my weight. Up here on the higher land it was colder than ever. The north wind hit me full; and I had been walking no more than five minutes when it began to snow."

Again Loto faced his mother. "You will say, *mamita*, that Providence was surely watching over me. I could not know it

then, but if it had not snowed that night I should never have returned to you. But it did snow—tremendous flakes, that soon came in a thick, soft cloud, and blotted out everything around me.

"I had put into my pocket my fur cap with ear tabs. I soon found I would have to wear it, but I would take it off before there was any chance of the girl seeing me.

"I was heading across the wind, plowing through the loose snow. I could see only a few feet ahead of me. It was a pathless waste. And suddenly the whimsical thought came that I was crossing Fifty-Ninth Street, from the ferry, and soon I would be near Columbus Circle. It was the same space, the same location. Nothing was different but the time—the changes time had brought." Loto smiled at his friends.

"The same space," murmured the Big Business Man. "Just think what an infinity of things that same space holds! Fifty-Ninth Street, from the ferry to Columbus Circle! Think of it in 1776! Or at the time of Christ! Or before the Stone Age!"

"And all the centuries between," the Doctor added.

"Or that gigantic city at its height, two thousand years from now," Georgie put in. "Think of what that space held then!"

"I took out my compass," Loto resumed, "and by the light of my electric torch, I consulted it, heading as nearly as I could toward the house. So far as I had been able to tell before, there was no other habitation on the island.

"I suppose I struggled along for nearly an hour. I figured I must be in the vicinity of the house now—though I could see nothing but the snow covered ground a few feet ahead of me, the whirling flakes close at hand, and blackness overhead. Without warning, through a rift in the clouds to the east, came moonlight—a gigantic, egg shaped moon with a reddish tinge to it that gave the scene a lurid, extremely weird look.

"The house was in sight, ahead and to the left on a slight rise of ground no more than a quarter of a mile away. I was faced now with the necessity for a definite course of action. From the laboratory,

with my telescope, I had occasionally seen the girl late at night sitting in the central living room of the house. I had seen her through the transparent door and windows; and she had always left the public room to the southeast. The house faced south; I felt that her room was in the southeast end. The inclosure lay mostly behind the house—to the north, with the dog kennel in its extreme northern wall.

"This was all advantageous to me. I knew I had to keep down the wind from those dogs. With a wind of from twenty to thirty miles an hour blowing from them to me, I felt sure that they would not get my scent. My plan was to get into the house—either through a sort of gateway in the southeast wall of the inclosure or directly in through a window. I would locate the girl, carry her away—by force, I suppose. I was confident—absurdly so, I realize now. I think it was the enthusiasm—the excitement of being actually engaged in what I had contemplated for two long years—had worked so hard to attain.

"My heart was beating fast as I crept forward, Collinger in my gloved hand. It was still snowing hard, and presently the cloud swept back over the newly risen moon; but I was now so close up that I could see the dark outlines of the house, and the wall of the inclosure.

"The building was only one story, but quite high, with a queer looking overhanging roof—mound shaped. The wall of the inclosure was some ten feet high. I circled to the south, and was soon close up to the main doorway of the house. The whole place was piled with snow. There was not a sound—only the wind howling as it swept in gusts under the low eaves.

"The glass door—I suppose it was glass was a single rectangular pane in a dark narrow frame. It was no more than three feet broad, and at least twelve feet high. Behind it I could see the interior dimly lighted—a soft, blue-white light. I could not see where it came from.

"For quite a while I must have stood there motionless, peering in. A portion of a large room was in the line of my sight. It seemed unoccupied—a back wall hung with something dark; a sort

of low couch to one side; queerly shaped, low chairs and a table or two. And there was a floor covering of some thick, soft textile, and several furs lying about—a large fur rug covering the couch—I got the idea it might have been a dog-skin.

"To the right I could see a low archway, hung with a curtain. That was in the direction of the girl's room. There were two other archways with curtains but evidently no interior doors to the house.

"I had been pressing against the glass pane; it seemed to give a little. I pushed. The motion was inward, and greater at the bottom. I knelt down and shoved it. The lower half swung silently and smoothly inward and upward while the upper half came out and down. The whole twelve foot pane was pivoted at its center. When it paralleled the floor it stopped, and there was a six foot high opening for me to walk under and into the house.

"I took a cautious step, listening intently, peering around me—behind me—with the sudden feeling that something supernatural might leap forth—spring at me—any instant.

"But the Collinger in my hand—my finger on its trigger—gave me courage. In my left hand I held the electric flash light; and very slowly I crept toward the curtained archway behind which I hoped the girl might be. Suddenly I remembered my cap. I smiled at the absurdity of the detail—but nevertheless I pulled it off and stuffed it in my pocket. Then I went forward, pushed aside the curtain, and entered the space behind it.

"I was in darkness as the curtain dropped. It must have been a sort of anteroom, or a short hallway, for some twenty feet ahead of me I saw another curtain with a blue radiance beyond it.

"A moment more and I had pushed aside the further curtain and stood peering into the room beyond. It was more dimly lighted than the living room. Across it, in an angle of wall, the first thing my gaze caught was a low couch or divan, bathed in the blue radiance from a brazier beside it, which left the rest of the room in gloom. The girl lay there asleep. A soft, pure-white fur was covering her, but her bare

arms and shoulders were above it. An arm was crooked under her head for a pillow—the other, white almost as the rug, lay stretched out over the fur. On her breast her golden hair lay in waves.

"I stood transfixed at the ethereal loveliness of the face, calm in deep slumber—a small oval face of seemingly perfect features, with soft, curving red lips slightly parted; smooth cheeks with a delicate rose color in them, and long dark lashes that lay motionless as she slept.

"My emotion at the picture was short lived—other thoughts crowded upon me. What was I to do? I could not awaken the girl and ask her to come with me. She would not understand the words, and if she did, she would probably have screamed before I could get them out. Seize her—stifle her cries and carry her off forcibly? That is what I should have done, perhaps—taken her to the plane and left explanations until afterward.

"But, gentlemen, you will understand me—I could not bring myself to do that. Indeed, my whole instinct was to retreat from the room. I felt myself a gross intruder in a sanctified place, my very gaze an insult.

"What I should finally have done, I do not know. Events took the decision out of my hands. The wind outside roared with a sudden gust that must have pulled loose something under the eaves. There came a rattle, a thump, loud in the silence of the house. Then the wind died again.

"I glanced up to the ceiling, startled, with my heart pounding and the Collinger pointed toward the sound. I could see nothing but the dark rectangle of a window up there. My gaze fell again to the couch—and met the opened eyes of the girl! She was sitting up, her hair tumbling over her shoulders, one hand instinctively gripping the white fur to raise it more closely about her, the other pressed against her mouth. I think I could never imagine an expression of more utter terror than that on her face.

"I murmured something intended to be reassuring and made the mistake of taking a step forward. It was the worst thing I could have done, for her frightened scream rang out through the house.

"I tried to think quickly, but I realized

now I was wholly confused. I turned back toward the curtain. I would escape from the house—come back some other time. Or should I pick her up now, and run with her? She was small—frail. I could carry her easily; escape almost as quickly with her, perhaps, as by myself. And shoot back at any one—anything—that followed.

"I found myself back at her couch. She had withdrawn to the further side of it, huddled against the wall. Her horrified eyes were on my face, but she did not scream again.

"There was a noise behind me, I swung about. The curtain was parting. There was a figure there. I could not see it plainly; it was in the darkness, and I was in the light. I aimed the Collinger, pressed the trigger. Simultaneously a tiny pencil-point of light seemed to spring at me from where the figure was standing—a brief, very tiny, but horrible intense glare flashed in my eyes.

"I was in darkness; everything went black. I did not fall, but reeled sidewise. I heard a mocking laugh; footsteps running up to me; a hand struck me across the mouth.

"It is terrible to fight in total darkness. I stumbled aimlessly somewhere, and felt the Collinger twisted from me. But when I lurched in that direction, my outflung arms met only empty air. Again a hand struck me across the mouth; again that mocking laugh. My assailant was playing with me!

"I was unhurt, and desperately I rushed to where I thought the room's exit might be. But strong fingers gripped my shoulder and I was flung violently sidewise. I must have struck my head against something as I went down. My senses faded; the last thing I remember was that jeering, mocking laughter out of the darkness!"

CHAPTER VI

ESCAPE.

I CAME to myself still lying where I had fallen. Striking my head had knocked me out momentarily. I heard voices; some one was kneeling beside me.

"I opened my eyes, but everything was black. I remember feeling my head. It was not cut—only a lump on it. I was unhurt, and I struggled to a sitting position. Whoever it was beside me, now stood up and moved away. The girl's voice came to me out of the darkness. The low words were unintelligible—yet they were words not wholly unfamiliar in ring.

"The darkness was full of little darting red spots. And my eyes pained me—the back of the eyeballs were burning. I was blind. I had not realized it—"

"Blind!" exclaimed Georgie. "Oh, that little light he shot at you—"

"I had not realized it before, I thought the light in the room had suddenly been extinguished—and a vague idea that my antagonist could see in the dark had possessed me. But it wasn't so. He had blinded me, with the tiny flash of light that had struck into my eyes.

"My head was still reeling from the blow when I fell. They carried me, half-conscious, into some other room, and left me lying on something soft. I closed my eyes, but I could not shut out those darting red spots. At last, I must have drifted off to sleep.

"When I awoke it was morning. The red glow of the sunrise was coming in a small aperture up near the ceiling. I could see it; the blindness had passed. My head was still ringing, my eyes still pained me. But I was uninjured.

"I was on a low couch, with a fur rug under me. My overcoat lay beside me on the floor. The whole thing seemed like a dream to my mind, but finally I got it straightened out.

"I was in a fairly large bedroom. Two windows of heavy transparent material were up near the ceiling. Opposite to the windows was a doorway with a curtain. I slipped into my overcoat, searching its pockets. My cap was there, but the compass and the flash light were gone and my Collinger had already been taken from me.

"The storm outside seemed to have passed. The house was dead silent. I went to the curtain; beyond it was a small hall, empty, and with another curtain at its further end. This I pushed aside cautiously.

I was looking into the main living room of the house, and met the direct gaze of a man who was lounging there!

"I dropped the curtain hastily, but he had seen me and sprung to his feet—a powerful man, taller than myself, with gray, wide trousers and naked torso. I had retreated back to the bedroom—the fear of what he might do to me, blind me or worse, made me anything but anxious to encounter him again.

"He followed, and was upon me, twisting me by the shoulders to face him. He was a man of about thirty-five. Black hair, long to the base of his neck. Smooth-shaven—a strong, rugged face, with keen gray eyes beneath black, bushy brows; a nose a little like a hawk, and a wide mouth with thin lips. It was the sort of face that bespoke power—a nature born to dominate its fellows. And cruel, essentially cruel about the mouth. His gaze was searching—puzzled. I knew he was trying to make me out—wondering what manner of man I was—where I had come from. He spoke to me. I could not understand the words, but again I got the impression that they were familiar English words spoken differently. I answered; I don't remember what; but he frowned, and pushed me from him, toward the couch.

"I had decided to appear docile. I stumbled to the couch and sat down on it. He stood in the center of the room, regarding me; and I managed what I hoped might be an ingratiating smile. This seemed to appeal to him, for he smiled back. Then he swung about and left the room.

"For a while I sat quiet. The girl—where she was I did not know. I would have escaped without her if I could—but escape did not seem possible. At least, it was more of a risk than I cared to take. The feeling came to me that even now as I sat on the couch, I might be observed. How could I tell that some one was not watching me from behind some hidden orifice, through which, as I turned my gaze that way, that tiny, blinding beam of light would spring at me?

"It was too big a chance. I would wait, and when I knew better with what I had to contend, watch my opportunity to escape.

"The room was fairly light now—that queer reddish light. I could see the sky, brilliant with a glorious red sunrise, through the little windows overhead. I moved the table and climbed on it. Outside was snow, tinged with red. I was at an east end of the house, perhaps next to the girl's room.

"At a corner of the building nearby, sat one of the dogs—like a gigantic shaggy wolf, quiet but alert. His head was fully six feet above the ground as he sat there squatting on his haunches. He heard me open the window, and trotted quietly over to look at me. My fascinated stare met his eyes squarely—eyes that seemed to hold an almost uncanny human intelligence. He seemed satisfied with the situation for he trotted back to the corner of the house, and sat down again. But he was still watching me.

"I dropped to the floor. The incident had left me shuddering. What manner of brutes were these, with gleaming tusk-like teeth, dripping jowls and a power in those tremendous muscles that must have far exceeded the strongest horse! And eyes that might have been human! I was further from thinking of escape that moment than ever.

"For three days they fed me in that room. A woman came mostly. She wore a loose, shapeless robe of dark cloth. It was dowdy-looking. Her hair was iron-gray, long, to her waist, twisted into a bundle and bound with strips of dark cloth. Her face was thin—careworn. She brought me my food—some kinds of cooked meats, and starchy vegetables, like potatoes. She was kind enough—but grim, as though I were an unpleasant task that her conscience made her discharge punctiliously.

"I tried to talk to her, but she couldn't understand me—nor I her. Afterward, I learned she was the older man's old maid daughter. The old man himself came in a few times—a smooth-shaven, stalwart man of seventy perhaps, dressed in wide flowing trousers, and naked above the waist. Sometimes he wore a short little house jacket. His name was Bool. The younger man—the master of the house—was named Toroh. He came in and sat by me a few times, always intent to see that I was properly

cared for. But there was no mistaking the fact that he would have killed me without compunction had I annoyed him; and I could not forget his sardonic laughter when he had blinded me."

"You fired the Collinger at him," Georgie said suddenly. "Didn't you hit him? He wasn't—wasn't invulnerable to a bullet, was he?"

"No," Loto answered with a smile. "He was quite as human as I. He was standing in the shadow and I missed him. His blinding-flash struck my eyes just as I fired. I was telling you about my first three days in the house. I did not see the girl, except once, just for a moment. I was not held to the room, although I stayed there almost continuously. And one or the other of those dogs was outside all the time. After the first day, I grew bold enough to go into the living room. The woman sent me back, but I tried it again.

"Once, when I was sitting alone in the main room, the girl entered. She stood in the doorway, and for the first time I realized how small and slight she was. She looked almost Egyptian—I mean her manner of dress. A blue-colored cloth was wound wide about her hips, with a dull red sash hanging knee-length down one side. Sandals on her bare feet; breast-plates of metal; a broad, low-cut collar of cloth with little coins on it, that lay flat on her upper chest and widened to cover her shoulders. And her golden hair was parted forward over her shoulders in plaits that ended with little tassels.

"Of course, I didn't see all those details then. She was standing there staring at me, and this time there was no fear in her eyes—only curiosity. My heart leaped; it was what I had hoped for most. I could do nothing toward planning to get her out of the house so long as she continued afraid of me.

"I smiled at her in as inoffensive and friendly a fashion as I could. Her eyes fell, then came up and I could see she was wondering at my clothes—my shoes, trousers, shirt and collar and tie. Abruptly the idea came to me that except for my garb, I probably did not look extraordinary or frightening to her. The thought gave me

new courage. I stood up, and spoke. At once she turned and ran from the room.

"We were a strange household, but after a time, except for having my meals alone, I found I could move about pretty freely.

"Once Toroh brought me my electric torch, and making sure I did not aim it at him, he made me light it. I knew he believed it a weapon. I thought this a good chance to convince him I was friendly. I smiled and shined it into my eyes, to show him it was harmless. He grunted, and taking the flash light from me tossed it across the room, as of no use or further interest.

"Then he produced my Collinger and made me show him how to operate it. But he was too clever to let me hold it; he did not let it get out of his hands. When he had fired it at a mark out the doorway, he grunted again and laid it on the snow. At a distance of twenty feet he stood with some object in his hand which he did not show me. Abruptly the Collinger flew into fragments! All its cartridges had been exploded simultaneously. The bullets whistled past us, startling Toroh as much as they did me. Later I learned he had exploded it by something akin to radio. He picked up the remains and when he got back into the house, he tossed my broken weapon away disdainfully. It was the attitude a soldier of to-day might have toward an Indian warrior and his bow and arrow."

"But what did these people think you were?" the Big Business Man demanded. "Some foreigner of their own world?"

"Toroh thought I had come from another planet. He had seen my plane the morning I hovered over the house. No one from another planet had been to the earth for centuries. But history told of them, and he thought I was one of them, come again. He treated me kindly enough—probably because I did not anger him or cross him in any way. But I had seen him strike the girl across the mouth; and one day he struck the woman. I have never seen such a look of sullen, repressed hatred as she gave him. She seemed to hate her father too. Later, I often saw him cuff her when she annoyed him."

The Doctor would have interrupted, but Loto raised his hand. "I have so much

to tell you. The girl—her name is Azeela. Toroh took two of his dogs and his sled and went away after about a week. He was gone a month. During that month I stayed docilely in the house. I saw many opportunities when I might have escaped. But now I would not, without taking Azeela, and I could not expose her to such danger as always seemed imminent.

"I must have convinced them all that I was harmless. No one paid me great attention except the woman—Koa. Often I would see her peering furtively at me from some distant doorway.

"Azeela soon became friendly, and since we both had nothing to do, she devoted herself to learning my language. I tried to learn hers and failed miserably. But she picked mine up with extraordinary rapidity. Perhaps because her mind was quicker—her memory more retentive. And I think also because she had behind her the inherited instincts of knowledge through all the centuries from my own time-world forward.

"At all events, within the month she could talk my English freely enough for us to get along—with a quaint little accent wholly indescribable."

"*Your English!*" exclaimed the Doctor. "Was her language English also?"

"Yes, sir. I think it was derived very nearly from the English we speak to-day. Mine was, to her—merely archaic. But hers, modern beyond my time, was too much for me. It was an extraordinary story that Azeela had to tell me—as extraordinary as mine must have seemed to her. We became friends, and with her confidence came a renewed desire on both our parts to escape. Her people were many hundred miles away. And when I told her of my plane, I very soon persuaded her to let me take her back to her own country."

"Toroh hadn't found the plane?" Georgie put in.

"No. If it had not snowed so heavily that first night, the dogs would have led him back over my trail to it. But it was still safe, though I did not know it then; and the thought that it might have been found bothered me a lot I can tell you.

"We decided to try and escape. Toroh

was expected back any day. We spent a morning discussing it—planning it in detail. My weapons were gone—Azeela did not know where they were. Bool had a cylinder of the blinding-flash—I call it that because their name for it would mean nothing to you. But we could not get it; he kept it always about his person. The woman, Koa, we did not think was armed—though she might have been.

"Toroh had taken two of the dogs. There was one left, and almost continually it was pacing about the house outside. We realized that even if we succeeded in getting away with a few minutes start, the dog would follow and overtake us before we could reach the plane.

"Bool was in one of the outbuildings nearly all that morning. Koa was moving about the house. We did not think she was listening to us; but she was, and evidently she had picked up something of my language—enough to give her the import of what we were discussing.

"She appeared suddenly, and with a furtive glance around, told Azeela she would help us escape. Azeela translated it to me, and the woman nodded grimly in confirmation. She was sorry for Azeela; and she hated Toroh sufficiently to want the girl out of his clutches.

"Koa's plan was simple and it sounded eminently practical. She had no weapons, and did not know where any were, except those of her father, which she would not dare try to secure. But late that afternoon Bool would be in his room dozing. Koa would lock the dog in the kennel. Then we would be free to depart.

"The sun was almost setting that day when Koa informed us that the time had come. We had restrained our excitement; Bool had apparently not noticed anything unusual in our outward appearance during the day. He had retired to his room as customary, and Koa had taken the dog away.

"I did not altogether trust Koa, and it made me shudder to think of taking Azeela outside and perhaps have the dog spring upon us from somewhere. But we had to chance it, and the woman seemed sincere.

"We had searched the house as best we

could without arousing Bool, but we found no weapon of any kind. At last we were ready, I in my fur coat, Azeela in furs—shoes, trousers, and coat all one piece. She looked like a slender little Eskimo girl; and I smiled as she pulled up a fur hood that dangled at the back of her neck, and fitted it close about her face, tucking her hair up under it. I had been mistaken about head-gear. It just so happened that I had never seen any one of this time-world except when they had been bareheaded.

"I put on my own cap and we were ready. As we met in the main room, Koa nodded sourly for us to be gone. At that instant the dog, outside in the kennel, gave a long mournful howl. I don't know why; I suppose it was just fate. Koa, waving us toward the doorway, hastened away to quiet the dog.

"For a moment I hesitated. Should we start? Had the dog got loose? That moment of hesitation was too long. Bool stood in the doorway, staring at our fur-covered figures. Astonishment, anger, rage swept over his face. His hand went to his belt; he jerked something loose. I heard Azeela give a sharp cry of warning. Bool's hand held an object like a little crescent of glass, with a tiny wire connecting its horns. Sparks darted from the wire.

"I was about to leap forward when suddenly I was stricken. I can only describe it as paralysis. I stood stock-still; my arms dropped inert at my sides. I felt no pain; but I was rooted to the spot, without power to lift my legs. Azeela beside me, was evidently within the influence of the weapon also. She was standing rigid. Bool's face held a leer of triumph. His left hand was fumbling at his belt for some other weapon. I knew that in another moment he would have killed us. And still I could not move. I tell you, gentlemen, it was a ghastly feeling. There was a numbness creeping all over me. My hands were turning cold. My feet felt wooden. My legs were giving way under me, and in a few seconds more I think I should have fallen.

"It all happened very quickly. Behind Bool, Koa had appeared. He did not hear her; and she darted forward and struck at his wrist. The little crescent of glass

dropped to the floor and was shattered. A wave of heat swept over me—the blood rushing again to my limbs.

"Bool had turned furiously upon Koa, but my strength was coming back fast. I jumped at them, caught Bool unprepared. My body struck his and we went down. He fell backward—I on top of him. His hand now held a metal cylinder; he was trying to get it up to my face.

"Azeela came darting across the room, threw herself upon us, and with her two hands twisted the weapon from Bool's fingers. I did not know she had done it. I was enraged. Bool was kicking, squirming, and his left hand had me by the forehead, pushing my head back to expose my face. I flung myself down on him, my forearm striking his head against the floor. His hold relaxed; he lay still.

"When I got to my feet, Koa was stooping over Bool. She seemed frightened at what she had done, although I knew well enough that the man had mistreated her constantly, and that she could bear him no great love. She waved us away—still with that same stolid grimness.

"'Ask her if the dog is fast,' I said. 'Ask her, Azeela.'

"The woman nodded at me vehemently, and I gripped Azeela's hand and we hurried out. It was just sunset. The sky was like blood; the snowy ground was all tinted with it.

"We ran west, so fast that Azeela could hardly keep her feet. It seemed ten miles, but it wasn't more than one or two. We slowed up and walked a little, then went back to a run. There was nothing but that unbroken expanse of snow, with the drop that was the river ahead of us.

"At last I could make out the break in the plateau surface that marked the gully. We were running, and were no more than fifty feet from it, when from behind us we heard the loud baying of the dog—that eager baying of a dog following a trail and close upon its quarry! I went cold all over. I knew what had happened. Bool had recovered, and in spite of his daughter had let loose the dog upon us!

"I caught a glimpse of Azeela's white, frightened face as I gripped her hand and

jerked her forward. It was faster than carrying her. She stumbled, almost fell headlong, but I pulled her up and onward.

"We came upon the gully. For one agonized instant I wondered if the plane would still be there. The dog seemed almost upon us. I could hear its eager whine as it came leaping along. Then I saw the plane—snow-covered, but apparently undisturbed.

"We flung ourselves down the gully side, sliding, falling to its bottom. The deep snow there broke our fall. The dog was at the top. I saw its huge head and its bared fangs as it dashed along, selecting a place to descend.

"I jumped to the cabin platform of the plane and shoved open the door. Then I stooped, grasping Azeela under the armpits and lifting her. The dog came sliding into the gully, and gathering itself up—it leaped.

"But we were inside, and I slid the door closed just as the brute's great body struck the cabin with an impact that rocked the plane. The dog fell, but was up again with a snarl, standing on its hind legs, its huge paws scratching at the cabin wall.

"I had flung Azeela to the floor of the compartment. She shouted at me reassuringly, and I jumped to the Frazia controls.

"A moment later the helicopters were raising us out of the gully. The dog's baffled yelps grew fainter. As we rose into the air I saw Bool, a quarter of the way from the house, stumbling along through the snow, following the trail.

"I went up a thousand feet, dropped a little, and began horizontal flight. To the south, perhaps a mile away, Toroh's sled, with its two dogs, was swinging up toward the house. He saw the plane, and as we swept over him at an altitude of some five hundred feet, he turned and followed us.

"It was amazing to see those two gigantic dogs run. They must have been pulling the sled at fifty or sixty miles an hour, for they kept almost under us. We came to the south of the island and they went down a declivity and out over the frozen, snow-covered water. Toroh was lashing them with a long quirt.

"I put on more power, and we gradually

drew ahead. When we had crossed the broad expanse of bay, the sled was no more than a black blob in the distance. It swung to the right, turned and went back—lost to our sight in the gathering darkness.

"We were alone, fairly started southward to Azeela's native country and her people from whom Toroh had stolen her."

CHAPTER VII.

"I MUST GO THERE AGAIN."

FOR some minutes past the Big Business Man had been awaiting an opportunity to interrupt.

"I don't quite understand," he began, hesitantly. "I've been wondering—Loto, you spent a month in that house, but you've only been away from us some twenty-eight hours. We know. We've been right here. How could that be? You—"

"Your reasoning is quite wrong, Will," the Chemist exclaimed warmly. "Loto lived in that future time-world, went forward in it at its natural pace for the period of a month. Then he returned, back through time, and he stopped off at a point twenty-eight hours farther along than the point at which he started. Don't you grasp that?"

"I'd like to hear more about Azeela," Georgie put in timidly. "Where was her home, Loto?"

Loto had refused Georgie's proffered cigarette, and was fumbling in his pocket. He produced a little black pipe and lighted it before he went on.

"Azeela and her people live on an island which once was the mainland—the southeastern corner of the United States as we know it to-day. It's a narrow, crescent-shaped island—something like Cuba in outline, but smaller. It is separated from the mainland by a channel some ten miles at its greatest width. It was for this island we were heading—south over what seemed almost a snow-covered waste. It was growing dark, but presently the moon rose—a red moon."

"And that red, burned out sun," mused the Big Business Man.

"No, sir. That's where you're wrong—totally wrong. The sun is not burning out. That sun was quite as hot, intrinsically, as the one that shone on you this afternoon. The red color is entirely atmospheric—a condition local to earth. It turned almost to yellow each day as the sun rose higher."

"But the cold—the snow and ice," protested the Doctor.

"Climatic conditions, apart from the sun," Loto answered.

"Climate is the most potent factor of all that influence mankind. This change throughout ten thousand years was dramatic in its effects. It hastened decadence. It drove civilization toward the equator. And then, as though nature were bent upon destruction, disease sprang up in the only warm regions left—disease that could not be coped with. Insects, carrying and transmitting deadly bacteria, swarmed over what we call the torrid zone, making it almost uninhabitable. An exodus from the earth began. The other planets took back their own—and millions of our people went with them.

"You must realize over how long a period this went on. The lifetime of an individual was only a tiny fraction of it. But at last the earth was again cut off. No one bothered to come here from other worlds. They had gone and left us—rats leaving a sinking ship.

"Even that was thousands of years before Azeela's birth. This island had formed, and nature had seemed to hold it the one place where humanity could make its last stand. A volcano stood at each end—beneficent, treasured because they contained heat. The internal fires of the earth had broken through here. Hot springs and geysers dotted the land. A river just below the boiling point rose from subterranean depths, flowed for a hundred miles, and plunged down again. And a huge range of mountains east and west on the mainland to the north offered shelter from the cold winds that were coming down.

"Upon this palm-covered, tropical island Anglo-Saxons with a strain of Latin settled long before the conditions farther north had become so drastic. They kept to themselves—fought against the pollution of

their blood by others. They were of the stock of highest type of earth civilization—become decadent.

"For centuries they were left to themselves—to drift along in their own fashion. But with the coming of the cold the mixed races of the north began moving down—coveting the island. Then these island people suddenly sprang into activity. Defense of the homeland brought action. Lost arts of war were revived. The Anglese—that is as near the sound of their word for themselves as I can get—repulsed all comers.

"To the north was now a climate that held snow from September to June. Only three brief months availed for agriculture. The mixed peoples there did not rise to master such rigors. Centuries of struggle turned them almost primitive—with arts and sciences and ways to conquer their environment lost and forgotten. They were barbarians.

"Such was the condition as I found it, gentlemen. I can give you details only of our northern half of the western hemisphere. Transportation was back nearly to the primitive; the rest of the world was almost unknown to Azeela's race.

"We flew the plane all that night, following the coast line south, over snow and ice, with villages here and there—"

Loto stopped abruptly; his gaze went to the windows of the small room in which they were sitting. The stars were growing dim in a brightening sky.

"Why, it's morning," he added. "I've talked to you all night. See, there!"

"All night," murmured the Big Business Man. "One night! And I feel as though I had lived millions of them!"

The Banker returned his watch to his pocket. "Go on, boy. Did you get Azeela back to this island?"

"Yes, sir. And I found there a vital crisis impending. I— Oh, *mamita*, don't be worried! I must go there again."

Loto had turned impulsively to his mother. Lylda's breath was sharply in-drawn, but she smiled.

"Go again?" Her low, anxious words were almost inaudible. Her fingers clung to his desperately. "Go again!"

"Yes, *mamita*. I can help them there. I even think they need me. And I—I want Azeela. I want to marry her."

His words were tumbling over one another. "Toroh was an Anglese, but they banished him. He was plotting to overthrow the government. When he was banished, he went among the barbarians of the north and began organizing them for an attack on the island. Toroh has scientific knowledge; up there in the north he has been manufacturing weapons. Then he came back to the island secretly, and abducted Azeela. She's the daughter of Fahn—leading scientist of the Anglese—the man who holds the reins of power. With Azeela as hostage, Toroh planned to make Fahn yield.

"But now I have released Azeela; and Toroh's attack will come swiftly. That is why I must return—I can help. Toroh is a menace—the greatest figure for evil of that time-world. There will be war—a struggle in which the Anglese may go down before the onslaught of Toroh and the hordes of barbarians with whom he has allied himself. Oh, I can't tell you all the details—I'm too tired."

Loto did look tired, as though all his reserve strength had suddenly left him. "I came back, because I was afraid I would run out of petrol for the plane. And the Proton current, too. And I wanted to tell you—about it all. You can follow me if I need you. I've thought of a way to convey to you that I want you to come." His pleading gesture was to Rogers. "Let me go there again, father. Please let me go there again!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECOND DEPARTURE.

ONCE again, an evening later, the little company was gathered on the roof of the Scientific Club. The men had been examining the plane. Now they were standing in a corner of the board inclosure, bidding Loto good-by. Lylda seemed more composed at this second parting, but her eyes were misty as she kissed her son—to her still no more than a child.

"You've left directions for us, Loto?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes, *mamita*. With father. He will not open them until I have been gone a month. But, *'mita*, I will come back before then. You will see. It is nothing for you to worry over."

Beside the plane Loto shook hands gravely with Rogers.

"You have my letter, father? It explains everything fully. But do not open it until a month has passed."

"No," Rogers agreed.

"It might worry *mamita*," Loto added softly. "I will come back before a month, no doubt. And to worry her would be unnecessary."

The Banker and the others joined them.

"Boy," said the Banker, "there were a lot of things you didn't tell us last night."

"Yes, sir," Loto agreed smilingly. "But later I can tell you. I have had so much to do to-day—"

Georgie's hand on his arm made him turn.

"I want to speak to you—alone," Georgie said soberly. His face was flushed; he seemed laboring under tremendous excitement. "Alone—just a minute." Loto took him aside. "Listen," Georgie added swiftly. "I'm an orphan, you know. I haven't got a soul in this world, I guess, who cares a rap about me. I've made all my plans to-day—been at it every minute." He stopped and drew a deep breath. "I'm going with you! Listen, please let me go! Nobody 'll miss me—nobody 'll care if I'm gone forever." A note of pathos was in his eager, pleading voice. "Please let me go—I can help you a lot! You don't realize it, maybe, but I can. Will you?"

Loto recovered from his surprise, hesitated, then shook his head.

"Oh!" said Georgie, crestfallen. "Why not? Don't you think I can help you?"

"Yes, but"—Loto bent closer to him—"Georgie, here's the truth, just between you and me. Not a word to the rest?"

"No!" Georgie was thrilled.

"Well, listen. I'm liable to get into things as dangerous as the devil. You don't know anything about it—I didn't want to tell them last night."

"All the more reason why you ought to have me with you," Georgie declared.

"No. You see—well, I might never come back. And if I don't, if I'm not coming in ten years—twenty years—you'll know it a month from now. Father has a paper from me which will explain all that."

"What of it? Why shouldn't I go along with you—"

"No. Father will want to follow me, and I'm counting on *you* to join him."

Georgie was somewhat mollified. "Oh! Sure I'll do that."

"But not a word now?"

"No. But, say, Loto, don't bother to come back, will you? Give us a chance to come on after you."

Loto laughed. "All right. Maybe I won't come back. I'll count on you, anyway."

They shook hands solemnly.

"You bet," Georgie agreed. "And give my regards to Azeela. You didn't say you mentioned me to her."

"I didn't. I was pretty busy. But I will, Georgie."

"Right. Do that. Good luck, old man!"

Within five minutes more Loto was again in the plane, with its cabin door closed upon him. Again that queer, insistent humming. The plane glowed phosphorescent—seemingly brighter now, for the lights of the inclosure had been extinguished. Then that translucency of the solid cabin walls and the huge, spreading wings; a fleeting instant when they seemed vapory—a shimmering mist dissolving into nothingness. Then only the memory that the plane had been there, but now was gone.

In the starlight and gloom of the board inclosure the Big Business Man turned emotionally to his friends. "I wonder if I would dare make a trip in that—thing!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MESSAGE.

AN evening in September. Loto had been gone a month. Almost constantly some one of his four friends, or his father or mother, had been about the rooftop. But the Frazia plane had not ap-

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peared; the board inclosure where it had rested was empty.

The fear in Lylda's eyes had grown daily almost into terror. But she had not spoken of it, and her husband's consoling, hopeful words—couched sometimes in the seemingly cold, logical phrases of science—she had received with a brave, pathetic smile.

The month of waiting—almost interminable to them all—had passed; and now, at Rogers's request, they were again secluded in a private room of the club. Rogers sat by the center table, in the circle of illumination of the electrolier, with a sheaf of penciled script in his hand, and a torn envelope beside him. The men were facing him, expectant. Lylda sat in the shadows near by, staring before her into vacancy.

"A month," Rogers was saying. "It has seemed longer. I opened Loto's letter this afternoon—and then I telephoned to you all. Let me read you the message he left us."

He adjusted his horn rimmed spectacles. The men stirred in their chairs; Georgie lighted a cigarette and began puffing at it vigorously.

"It says:

"MY FATHER AND MY FRIENDS:

"When you read this I shall have been gone from your time world for thirty of its days. You will know that I am not coming back. Had I been forced to stay ten or twenty years of time as I would have lived them, I would still return to the exact evening—or before it—on which you are reading this letter.

"That was my promise to you, father. The fact that I am not returned will let you know that probably I am never coming.

"*Mamita* must not worry, for I gave you another promise. When danger threatened me—or when I wanted your help—I would raise a light signal so that you coming after me might know exactly what point of time at which to stop your flight.

"As I write this, now before leaving you, I renew that promise. When I find I cannot return, I will raise a light from the southeastern tip of the island. I will hold it in the sky for a day and a night. You will see it, if your time flight is slow enough, and I shall know that when I extinguish it you will be there.

"Tell *mamita* I shall not wait for danger, but anticipate it. You will see my light, no matter when I raise it. A year after I get there—or ten years—it will be no different to

you who follow me—only a few minutes of time progress in your plane. I shall expect you as soon as you can descend after seeing the light vanish. Do not delay then, father, for I will need you.

"Please tell *mamita* not to worry about me, or about you, either. We will both come back to her safely. You may bring any one or two of our friends who wish to make the trip. I think that Georgie will want to come, and I would like to have him. You need bring no weapons. They would be worse than useless."

Rogers's slow, solemn voice died away. He rustled the pages in his hand, folded them up carefully.

"That's all, gentlemen. All of the message itself. The other pages give detailed instructions—data based on Loto's first flight. And memoranda for the construction of another plane, gathered from previous notes made by Loto and myself."

There was complete silence when Rogers paused. Georgie decided to speak, but checked himself and sat back in his chair, his attention fixed on his cigarette.

"I shall start the Frazia Company on another plane at once," Rogers added. "And working on Loto's mechanism simultaneously, I should be ready in ninety days."

He waited, but again no one else spoke. Then he said:

"I am going, of course. It is a great trial for my wife, but she is willing."

Georgie turned and flashed an admiring glance to Lylda; her face was strained, but she smiled at him gently.

"Do not be hasty, my friends," Rogers went on quickly. "Any two of you are free to come—or to stay, all of you—as you think best."

"I'm going," said Georgie suddenly. "Loto said I could. And you say so. I'm going. I decided that long ago."

He jumped to his feet and grasped Rogers's hand. "You can count on me, Mr. Rogers. I'll stick—through anything—to the last."

Rogers smiled. "Thank you, Georgie. I knew I could count on you."

Georgie sat down again. Then he got up and crossed to Lylda, shaking her hand also, and whispering to her. But in another instant he was pacing the room, smok-

ing violently, frowning and staring at his feet.

Rogers was saying to the others: "I will take one more. I realize it is a momentous question. Your lives may be at stake."

The Big Business Man was deep in reverie. "I wonder," he murmured. "I wonder if I *ão* want to go! I've known right along I'd have to make this decision."

"Come on," urged Georgie, stopping suddenly before him. "Take a chance." He did not wait for an answer, but went back to his pacing.

"I don't think *I'll* go," the Banker declared, half apologetically. "You don't really need me, do you, Rogers?"

"Of course not," said Rogers heartily. "Use your own judgment. But I knew you'd be offended if I didn't give you the opportunity."

The Banker nodded. "Yes, but you don't need me. I'm an old man—seventy-three, though you'd never guess it perhaps. I think I'd better stay here where I'm used to things."

"Of course," agreed Rogers.

"But if you need money," the Banker added hopefully, "you will, naturally—everybody needs money—you'll call on me, won't you? I'm going to see this thing through."

"I don't believe I'll go," the Big Business Man declared. He met the Doctor's glance, and the Doctor seemed relieved. "You don't really need us, Rogers? I think Frank would prefer to stay also."

The Doctor nodded emphatic agreement.

"Quite so," said Rogers. "I can understand perfectly how you feel."

Georgie stopped his pacing. "Then it's all settled, Mr. Rogers. You and I go—the others stay on guard here. Now listen, everybody, I've got some good ideas—"

CHAPTER X.

THE FLIGHT THROUGH SPACE AND TIME.

TWO days before Christmas. Another plane lay glistening on the roof of the Scientific Club, walled in from curious eyes by the board inclosure. Sleek, self-satisfied, its every line denoting latent pow-

er, it lay motionless, awaiting those human masters who soon were to launch it into another time world.

Occasionally during the afternoon it was visited anxiously by a slim, boyish figure—Georgie, who was verifying again and again that all was in readiness.

Evening came. The others arrived, singly and in couples. For two hours a bustle of last preparations went on—things forgotten, last minute plans put into execution. But by nine o'clock the moment of departure was finally at hand.

The Banker was in a fluster of excitement. He had appointed himself the leader of those who were to be left behind, and he felt the responsibility keenly.

"Tell me exactly what we've got to do," he insisted. "I don't want anything to go wrong."

Rogers slapped him on the back. "It's nothing to be alarmed over."

"No. But I want to be sure I've got it straight. Tell me all over again."

Rogers repressed a smile. "When we have gone you will all wait some ten minutes—to be sure nothing has gone wrong to bring us immediately back. Then you will lock up the inclosure and leave. I have made arrangements with the club to have the inclosure left standing."

"That's all?" asked the Banker anxiously. "We leave the roof open?"

"Yes. In coming back we will want it open—and you cannot tell when we may return."

"But no more than six months?" the Banker insisted. "You promise that?"

Rogers nodded.

"Come on," Georgie's voice called. "Let's get started." He had shaken hands with Lylda and climbed up to the doorway of the cabin. "Come on, Mr. Rogers. Let's get started."

Lylda stood apart. Her farewell to her husband was brief. The others turned away, feeling that they should not intrude upon it. When Rogers had joined Georgie on the platform of the plane the Doctor and the Big Business Man were with Lylda comforting her.

With a final good-by Rogers slid the door closed. The forward compartment, with

its low arch ceiling and its concave walls, was small, but comfortably equipped. The side windows had upholstered seats running under them. In front, to the right, was a low seat with the Frazia controls before it, and a small window above them looking forward. The time dials and the Proton current switch were on the wall to the right. On the left of this seat was the outer, sliding door.

The division wall between the forward compartment and the engine room behind it held a small doorway with a sliding door.

"Are we ready?" Rogers asked. "I think we should be sitting. The shock of departure—new to us—may be more severe than we anticipate."

His words were calm enough, but they sent a thrill of excitement through Georgie. "All ready," he said. "Go ahead!"

Rogers took a last look about. Then without hesitation, he moved the switch to the first intensity.

Georgie was seated, gripping the arms of his chair. The humming seemed very different now than when he had heard it outside the plane. It was no louder, but it seemed to hum and vibrate inside his body. He was quivering inside; his head began reeling dizzily; there came that sickening, horrible sensation of falling headlong—a vertigo that turned everything to blackness.

"Are you all right? We've started."

It was Rogers's anxious voice, Georgie opened his eyes; everything seemed glowing, unreal, and ghostlike. But he was uninjured; and his head had steadied.

"I'm all right," he managed to say.

The sickness passed quickly. Georgie stood up, steadying himself. "Gosh, how light I feel! Queer in the head—don't you? I never imagined!"

He stopped abruptly. Through a side window the fur-coated figure of the Banker was standing against the wall with the others around him. They were staring at the plane with an expression that clearly indicated they could not see it.

"We've started all right," Georgie added. "Look at them! We're already in future time to them. They can't see us."

Suddenly the Banker came forward walk-

ing with extraordinary swiftness, and seemingly with little jerks, like a manikin. Georgie held his breath, for the Banker popped forward, his head and shoulders piercing the glowing phosphorescent walls and floor of the cabin. He stood motionless a brief instant, his face close to Georgie's knees. Then, even more rapidly than he had advanced, he threw a swift glance around and retreated.

Georgie recovered himself. "Oh," he said. "Wasn't that weird though? But we're all right. I feel fine now."

The droning of the Frazia motors sounded very faintly above the humming. It was a relief—a help toward normality. The plane was slowly raising into the air.

As it mounted, the roof of the Scientific Club dwindled away below. It was a dark night, with heavy clouds, and a cold wind from the east. The city, with snow on its rooftops, was sliding eastward beneath them—vague black shadows, dark buildings dotted with lights, and seemingly empty streets.

They were still mounting diagonally upward, drawn vertically by the helicopters and carried sidewise by the wind, when the Hudson River slid underneath.

"Rotten weather, Mr. Rogers," Georgie suggested.

"Yes," Rogers agreed. "But that will not bother us for very long. Are you warm enough?"

"One heater is going," Georgie responded. "I'll switch on another." He had familiarized himself thoroughly with the various mechanical appliances of the plane, and he turned a switch that threw current into another of the small electric radiators.

"Anything else?" he demanded.

"No, I think I shall try the higher intensities of the Proton current. I want our time-progress accelerating as much as possible right from the beginning."

Georgie selected a seat hastily.

It was not much of an ordeal. The humming seemed to move up a scale, to a higher pitch as Rogers pulled the lever around. The reeling of the senses came again, but passed almost at once.

"There," said Rogers' voice. "I'm glad

that's accomplished. We are at the fifteenth intensity—the highest that Loto used."

Georgie was staring down through the floor window. "I can see lights down here. The highest speed Loto used? Why he didn't describe it this way—"

"Our acceleration will pick up over several hours," Rogers replied. "Our time-progress is still comparatively slow."

The drone of the Frazia motors was still sounding.

"How high are we, do you suppose?" Georgie demanded after a moment.

"Possibly five thousand feet. We're blowing westward over New Jersey. And a little to the south, I think. Soon it will be—"

His words were anticipated. The scene lighted swiftly. It was day—a dull, cold-looking, cloudy morning. Below them lay New Jersey—almost a net-work of villages on the fringe of lowlands. A more congested area of buildings was almost directly beneath and slid under them as they watched it.

"Newark!" exclaimed Georgie. "And we're into to-morrow. We're making it—we'll soon be with Loto."

They were up higher than Rogers realized—ten thousand feet at least. And their drift seemed constantly of a more southern trend. It was still uncomfortably cold in the cabin.

"Perhaps we should stay at this level," Rogers remarked. "We seem to have caught a wind from the north."

He slowed down the helicopters until the plane was no longer rising. As though they had been in a balloon, they were hanging level, blowing over the country—nearly south at some twenty miles an hour.

Night came again in a few moments. Lights dotted the landscape below—but they were vague, flickering lights. Then day, with sunlight. The wind subsided. The plane's southern drift was stilled. And then came night with a moon plunging across the sky, and stars dizzily sweeping past. Then day again, until presently the daylight and the darkness were blended into gray. The drift was permanently passed. In a blending of all the diversified air currents, the plane remained almost stationary.

The white, snowy hills of New Jersey soon turned to green. The cabin air warmed a little. Then autumn and winter came again—and passed in a moment or two.

Rogers sighed with relief. "We're fairly started. One year out of twenty-eight thousand!"

"And we've got eight hundred or a thousand miles of space to travel also," said Georgie. "We're going to make that simultaneously, aren't we?"

"Yes," agreed Rogers.

Georgie took a last look through the floor window at the blurring gray landscape beneath, and stood up to join him. "Let's talk things over," he suggested. "I've got a lot of questions—plans and things."

Rogers had taken a sheaf of script from his pocket.

"Loto's notes to guide us," he explained. "I've followed them closely so far. We have a flight through time of something more than twenty-five thousand years at the fifteenth intensity, and then slacken. Simultaneously we must fly southward, some thousand miles or more through space, directing our course for the southern tip of Florida. Loto specifies that we should under all circumstances, reach the latitude of north Florida coincident with twenty-five thousand years of our time-progress. We will then—or perhaps a thousand years further along—see the island. We cannot miss it, of course. It is so large, and it must certainly endure over a great period of time."

"How long did Loto take to reach twenty-five thousand years?"

"About twelve hours," Rogers consulted the memoranda. "He computes his average speed as equivalent to the twelfth intensity. We are using the fifteenth continuously. Our clocks should register no more than the passage of ten hours for the time-flight."

"Ten hours," he added thoughtfully. "And flying directly south at a hundred miles an hour, we would reach the island in those ten hours."

"But we haven't started flying yet," Georgie protested. "We're moving through

time all right, but we're still right over Newark—and look at it!"

The New Jersey metropolis was spreading west to the Orange Mountains, and eastward, already it seemed linked solid with Jersey City. Factories dotted the intervening meadows, which now were drained of their stagnant water.

"You're right," exclaimed Rogers. "We have barely nine hours left—we must start our horizontal flight."

In a few moments more they were speeding south, and slightly west, at an altitude of some five thousand feet, with their progress through time steadily accelerating.

An hour, by their clocks went by. They were over Delaware Bay. Its shores seemed in the more congested areas almost solid with buildings. There was a great city on each side at the mouth of the river, with a gigantic bridge connecting them. The bridge rose into being under the eyes of the watchers in the flying plane, but they swept on past and in a moment left it far in the distance behind them.

Georgie was seated on the floor watching the changing landscape—a huge, concave, gray surface, shadowless, stretching out and up to the circular horizon. Steadily, like a panorama unrolled, it slid sideways beneath them. The motion was greatest directly below. To the west the mountains seemed, by an optical illusion, to be following, speeding forward with them.

The sea or its arms, constantly occupied a portion of the scene, for they were still flying south and somewhat west, following the Atlantic coast. And of everything in sight, the sea only seemed unchanging.

In time-progressing, that height of civilization Loto had described lay under them. They were flying lower now.

Rogers in his seat at the controls, said: "I think we're making it as we should. That's the four thousand year mark just passed. And we are flying at a hundred and ten miles an hour."

"Are you sure we'll hit it right?" Georgie asked anxiously.

"I think so. It is about as Loto figured so far. Those buildings—what a civilization that must be down there! It will fade presently. In three or four thousand years—"

Georgie joined him at the forward window. "Where are we? Are we still over Virginia?"

"Yes, at least, I think we haven't crossed into North Carolina yet. That was Chesapeake Bay a while ago. Look! That city there! It's melting—going down fast! What changes time does make! How little of it we can see or realize in a lifetime!"

The cabin interior was unlighted and dark, save for that phosphorescence with which everything glowed. In their absorption in the scene below, the travelers had forgotten their own curious aspect, until Georgie suddenly remarked:

"Look at us! Ghosts flying through space! Doesn't it make you feel queer, Mr. Rogers?"

The dim cabin interior, with its vague,

luminous human figures did indeed seem unreal. But the unreality was matched now by the scene beneath; their forward flight through space, combined with a time-progress now tremendously accelerated, made everything below a shifting, sliding kaleidoscope of changing effects that the eye could see, but the mind grasp only imperfectly. Details were transient things blurred one into the other.

The broad fundamentals, however, were obvious. The gray, concave land, ridged with mountains, the indented coast line, the gray, changeless sea—all were distinguishable. And overhead spread the sky, blurred and gray also—luminous with the mingled light of sun and moon, and a myriad starry worlds, and blended darker by nights of rain and snow and storm.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



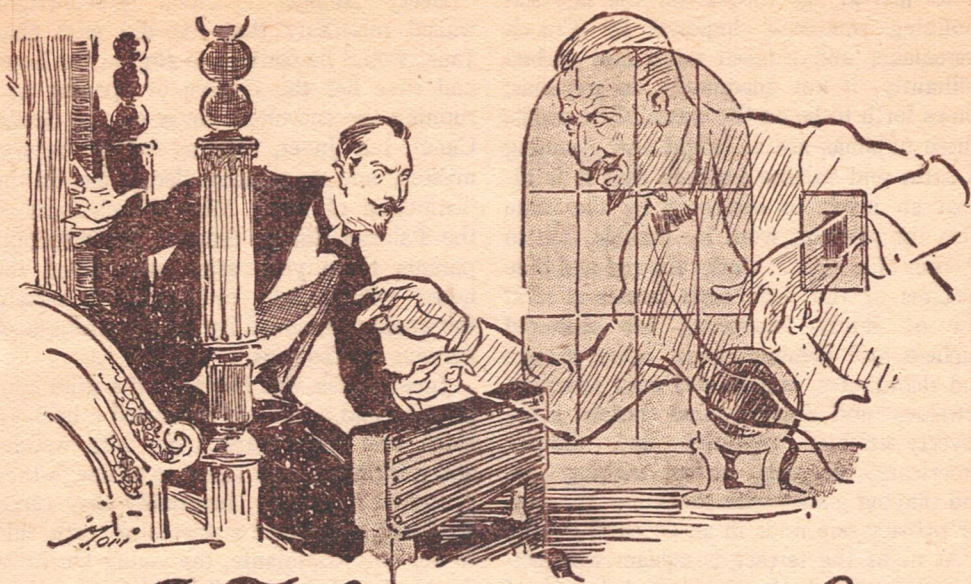
THREE SCENES

THE wild, bright hair of the morning streamed,
 From under the dusky hood of night;
 On the gleaming sand a young man stood,
 By the glittering sea waves flashing bright.
 The tide came steadily creeping in—
 Came steadily tramping over the sand;
 And over the glimmering, purple sea.
 A ship sailed from the land.

It was golden noon, and an older man,
 By the glistening sea waves stood alone,
 At the turn of the tide; 'twas ebbing out,
 With a restless, angry, shuddering moan.
 He looked away o'er the wrinkled waves,
 For a beautiful ship, with wings of white;
 The sea went up, the sky came down,
 And never a ship in sight.

The new moon launched her pearly boat,
 From the edge of the twilight's silver shore,
 And the dusky banners of night blew out
 O'er the glow of the sunset's crimson door.
 An old man lay, with streaming hair,
 When the tide forever had left the strand;
 The wreck of a ship came drifting in,
 And lay on the shining sand.

Carrie F. Wheeler.



A House on the Grand Canal

By **ELISABETH COBB**

SAIL across the lagoon, two miles straight out from Venice, and you will find a gleaming crescent of sand, fragrant with oleanders and heavy with hotels, that is called the Lido.

For the long months of the winter, when chill and penetrating winds sweep the sea and the beaches are hammered with driving spray, it is buckler and shield for the aging and fragile bride of the Adriatic; but for the summer, when the sea gleams like a sapphire and is docile as a puddle, the Lido is the playground of all Venetians and a goodly quota of the jeweled, frivolous and expensive crowd that make millionaires of those fortunate pirates who own the hotels in fashionable European resorts.

In June the poplars are clipped, the gardens cultivated to fragrant perfection, the celebrated French chef arrives, and the

Lido's greatest hotel throws open its doors to welcome the first guests—tourists who cannot afford the "height of the season" prices, but love Venice in her summer effulgence. By July the white speed boats are racing back and forth from Danieli's wharf every half hour, and the great open terrace of the hotel is decorated by a fair imitation of the season guest. By the first of August the Americans open their Palazzas in Venice, the first English duchess and the first minor royalty, traveling incognito, arrive, and the price of rooms, food, bathing suits, and bath houses, soars beyond even the calculations of Italian cupidity.

During an August day on the Hotel Excelsior's walled beach one may see the gayest and most colorful crowd in all Europe. The great world arrives, and within an hour

of its arrival has thrown off the hot and confining smartness imposed by French dressmaker and English tailor and garbed brilliantly, if not adequately, in pyjamas, comes forth to lie on the warm white sands. These pyjamas are so bright and gleaming in satin and shining brocade that it is almost an insult to designate by the same term the garment worn by humble folk to sleep in of a night. Under the red and blue awnings of the little bath houses a solid row of gaudy tenements, are sheltered duchess and demimondaine, opera singers and debutantes, counts and card sharpers, actresses and international tennis stars, poverty-stricken royalties and affluent Americans, sleeping, eating, making love and playing games with the same disregard for privacy one finds in an Oriental ghetto.

At night the terrace is agleam with colored lights and the faces and jewels of beautiful women, who dance languorous tangoes and swift fox-trots with a background of faintly glimpsed blue sea and of iridescent fountain spray and a canopy of Italian stars that seem to hang heavy in the sky, as easily to be plucked as so many ripe figs.

To the uneasy American social climber essaying to walk the paths of glory with those who have had money for more than one or two generations, and finding the going difficult, the Lido is a godsend for, in the month-long carnival that flourishes there, where all are relaxed, merry and at ease, acquaintances ripen quickly, and the playmate one finds at the Lido may be guide, mentor or dictator in New York.

So the Otis Wheelwrights, newly of New York, made a yearly peregrination via London and Paris, time-honored route with the recently rich, to their palace in Venice, so that Janet, their only child, a gorgeous girl, might spend every day beneath the awning of her bath house on the Excelsior's beach collecting minor nobilities to be carried back to New York in the autumn and there exploited beneath her ægis. Janet gave them a whirl through "restaurant society," hoping that some day she would be caught in the center of that whirl and sucked down to the quiet Empyrean of exclusive and long established New Yorkers.

Every summer Mamma Wheelwright wailed miserably that she did wish that Janet would be content to stay at the hotel and save her the trouble of opening and running the enormous house on the Grand Canal, but Janet, reveling in the beauty, mystery and magnificent decay, and in the distinction of being Miss Wheelwright of the Palazzo Effizzi, dragged her reluctant parents there year after year, filled the house with guests, and enjoyed herself, thoroughly unmoved by family protests or nervous breakdowns.

Janet's wish was law with the drab couple who had amazingly produced a brilliant child, and had regarded her with wonder and a little fear ever since, so although they protested invariably, invariably they came. As Janet, with some elements of truth, said to her only confidante, the young Duchesse de Fouchard Roche: "I enjoy myself at the Lido and mother enjoys being in Venice. She invariably develops some interesting ailment that gives her an excuse for a new cure in Switzerland every fall, and she wouldn't know what to do with herself else. Besides, there has never been anything mysterious about the Wheelwrights except my red hair, so once having got their hands on anything as intriguing as a haunted palace they would be fools to let it go."

One August afternoon, so hot that even the sun-loving Italian sought the shade, and the Americans begged piteously for iced tea and electric fans, the Wheelwrights—mamma and papa—bored and perspiring, and Janet, radiant in green silk pyjamas, and their five guests, arrivals from Paris that morning, limp with their trip and the heat, lay relaxed, half asleep, on the cushions and couches under the bath-house awning. Never beforehand had Janet, for all her wealth and beauty and determination, induced so distinguished a foursome to stay with her; and lazily she studied them, the gleam of the successful hunter in her eyes.

The fifth was more than negligible in her triumph, but in the good nature of her success she forgot the irritation with which she opposed his coming and forgave her father for his insistence in demanding his presence at this time. When a young lady

but three years old—and though Janet admitted twenty-three to four of her guests, she was only as old as her social birth—has induced the Duc de Fouchard Roche and his pretty American duchesse, Milly English, of Washington and Newport, and the Prince Augustin de Loret, in the opinion of authorities the best catch on the continent, to accept her hospitality for a month, she could easily forgive the presence of an insignificant suitor with whom she had believed herself in love once upon a time before there was so much money.

Janet knew that the four had honored her for no honest liking of her or her family; that they allowed themselves to be put under obligations for the sake of the Wheelwright millions and a month free from bills.

"Poor gilded flies around the honey pot," she thought, half resentful, half envious. "If they play my game I don't mind playing theirs."

Beside her sprawled the duchesse, scantily though effectively clad, her pretty, scheming little head buried in the duc's shoulder. Janet admired Alice Fouchard Roche as much as she admired any living human being, for Alice had been poor and pretty, and by sheer cleverness, backed by beauty and charm, not money, had amazingly married the duc, also poor and pretty, who had come to America in search of a fortune, avowing that he would not look twice at *Ninon de l'Enclos* if she were not rich. She had carried him off from under the very noses of half a dozen girls, who, though neither poor nor pretty, were as determined to wear a famous title and be connected with half the old French nobility and a goodly portion of the English, and now she flaunted her duc and her poverty in their faces and was brave and gay and malicious.

On the next couch lay Milly English, socially beyond criticism, a personality and a power, trying to hold the vagrant attention of Augustine de Loret, for whose sake she had accepted Janet's invitation. He, giving her but half his face, had ardent eyes on Janet.

"She looks like an amorous hatchet," thought Janet, and smiled at De Loret.

Of the fifth and unimportant guest, Bob

Talley, Janet was no more thinking than of the sand on which she lay, but a sudden flow of contentment through her heart made her lean over to give his shoulder a friendly pat. At that moment she was sorry for him, although she thought him stupid to stick to a losing game—sorry for him out of her boundless contentment, for she sensed what a shock it would be to him when she accepted the proposal she knew Augustine de Loret had come to Venice to make her.

The duchesse turned her head to look down the white beach that was so white, at the blue sea that was so blue and so bright it shone with the sickly luster of decaying fruit, and then brought her eyes back to Janet.

"Tell me about this haunted palace of yours," she said, accentuating the normal drawl of her lazy voice. "I am crazy about ghosts, all except the ghosts of wronged ladies who walk at night carrying their heads in their hands. We stayed in four houses in England this year, and they all had headless, naughty ladies haunting them. England is so monotonous. The ghosts are as alike as the dinners. But a Venetian ghost ought to have something different about it. Tell me the story, Janet. These people are being so dull that unless you curdle my blood with horror I am liable to go to sleep."

There was more than a hint of patronage in her voice. Not even the splendid, noble ghost would she willingly leave untouched by her secret contempt for everything that pertained to the Wheelwrights. In a hundred ways she pricked her friends with tiny insults, the more content to have the power to sting as she knew how valuable she was to Janet and how greatly she and her impetuous duke needed the aid of the Wheelwright millions.

Janet smiled serenely at her, impervious to the pin pricks of a poor duchesse since she so soon would be a wealthy princess.

"Do you think this is an appropriate setting for such a story? Ours is a very superior ghost, I'd have you know, and surely his tale rates an impressive background."

There was a murmur of dissent from

Milly and De Loret, and a sturdy backing from Talley.

"How can you play spooks with that in front of you?" he demanded, and jerked a big hand toward the shining beach and the crowd of gay figures bathing in the blue sea.

"What a conventional mind," drawled the duchesse, eager now for the entertainment denied her. "Look at the color out there, the fantasy of that scene. It is gay and bright and all that, but surely any one with any imagination can see that it is just a little rotten. Why, a sinister story whispered in the center of this is like finding a rattlesnake coiled around a flower, a crime at the Follies. Medieval horrors on the Lido—charming!"

Janet smiled a smile that had something mysterious in it and straightened her long legs. Her voice, as she began the story, changed from the high-pitched whine of the modern New Yorker until it was deep and soft, and her words were no longer cut with slang, but were precise and studied:

"This is the story, then, Alice," she said. "You know that our house is one of the most ancient in the city of Venice. The foundations were built before Dandolo, the old, blind warrior Doge, sacked Constantinople on his way to the Crusades, and brought back to Venice the Palo Doro and Nero's bronze horses; but one of the Effizzis sailed with him, and when he returned from the wars rebuilt the palace. That is why it is adorned with arches and colonnades in the Byzantine manner.

"When this brave Effizzi returned, racked with fever contracted in the pestilential East, he found that his lovely bride had died of the plague. Her long, red-gold hair had been cut off and saved as a pitiful remembrance, and this he took and placed in the keystone of the door arch. Every year on the anniversary of her death she comes to the Pallazzo to comb her hair. I have never seen her, and she is but a sad and gentle spirit. The permanent ghost is the spirit of old Emanuele Effizzi, the great-great-grandson of Dandolo's Effizzi.

"Emanuele was very wicked. He was a member of the dread council of ten, as bloodthirsty as a scimitar and as cold as

the barren sea. Some say that he was a diabolist and performed the dread ceremony of the black mass in the chapel of the Pallazzo and invoked Satan with sacrifice of fresh human blood. It was known that once there was famine in Venice, and though his storerooms were bursting with grain, he would not sell it to the unfortunate people until they paid for it its weight in gold.

"He foully murdered with his own hands his beautiful wife and had his only brother stabbed by hired assassins, because he coveted his inheritance; and the poor, hacked body was carried across the sea and buried in the slime.

"He lived in great magnificence and collected rare manuscripts, gems of splendid beauty, tapestries from the looms of Flanders, enamels and the embroideries of the East, pictures by the greatest artists of his time; in fact, he was possessed by a lust for all rare and curious and beautiful things.

"When he lay dying a terrible repentance gripped him and so tortured was he by the knowledge of his past sins that he died in agony, although the wise surgeons said that he had no great bodily infirmity, and might have passed away gently from the exhaustion of old age. Before he died he swore an oath to haunt the old house and drive away any evil souls who should enter, so that never again might a bad man find peace in the home of his ancestors. No wicked heart, he vowed, could ever rest there among the spirits of his forefathers, gentle and noble folk. So long as the stones of the walls held together, so long would he walk among them, a guardian strayed from hell, faithful forever to an endless watch.

"So, if one is pure in heart and deed, one may live in peace in the house on the Grand Canal. But if one has an evil soul and goes in the room where Emanuele died—and they say that if one has an evil soul, such a one is compelled mysteriously and irresistibly to enter there—so surely will he be driven to madness and death.

"Once a man who entered the room was driven to suicide, by terror; and a girl who slept there was found dead in the morning, her face frozen into a loathsome mask. But no one knows what form the ghost assumes

or by what terrible manifestation, strong as Satan, he so chastises the wicked. Out of that room comes relentless death—that is all we know.”

Janet told her story well, and her guests shivered a little in the sun. The ice in her voice had so insinuated at darker and more unmentionable horrors.

Then the duchesse laughed.

“I congratulate you, my dear!” she cried. “The Wheelwrights must be almost too good to be true to exist in such a house. Ninety-nine and two-thirds per cent pure. It floats!”

That night, in the flushed, relaxed and confidential hour that follows a good dinner eaten in pleasant company, inevitably the old legend returned to the thoughts of the party who sat at ease in the candlelight in the house that belonged to the villain of that legend. Throughout the meal the conversation had been interesting, free and vivacious, the food delicious, the wine of a fine vintage; and so the party was flushed with well-being. Reflection came with digestion, and Janet’s guests wondered that she could love this palace, for, as the roses on the table wilted a little in the heat, came uneasy belief in ghosts and haunted houses and the dread power of the dead over the quick.

As they sat there, the great dining hall, with its faded brocade and tapestry hangings and old polished oak all softly aglow in the haze of candlelight, suddenly seemed artificial. A smiling chimera raised from an icy void that they could feel, had surrounded that gracious room. Just outside the circle of light and perfume fear had crept, waiting to touch one’s breast with a cold hand.

The duchesse’s face was a little pale beneath the rouge as she rose from the table and strolled to the arched windows opening on the canal. The long windows gave a view down the Grand Canal, quite dark for a long distance until it met furious light and a Campanile in silhouette against the sky. It was like a blow in the eyes, that sudden light in the soft darkness; light in the sky and light tripled and quadrupled until one light was a myriad of lights in the mirror of water. Through the arches of

the balcony she could see the little gondolas, just shifting shadows on shadow, and hear drifting through the stillness the quick slap and suck, slap and suck, of their oars, and the singing from the barges anchored in the lagoon.

There was peace and beauty out there, but at her back hovered a menace. She was so conscious of a presence just behind her which any second might stir her hair with a breath from the grave, or put a dreadful face over her shoulder, that she fought with an impulse to whirl, screaming, to fight the thing away. The people at the table were laughing, the queer laugh that comes from the lips only, and it was out of key. There was no rest in this room.

“Janet,” said the duchesse, turning from the window very slowly, her body held quite stiff and straight, “there is something the matter with this house, and I am scared. Is there always this feeling here?”

Janet shook her head; there was trouble in her eyes.

“I never felt this before. It—is—queer.”

“Ah!” Alice de Fouchard Roche sighed, secret relief in her heart that she could speak; that her lips would form recognizable sentences. “Then some one around here is very, very bad indeed, and Signor Effizzi is inviting him out. The old boy is certainly walking to-night.” Suddenly her face lit and a malicious smile grew on her lips. She flung both arms out dramatically and cried: “Let us defy this ghost, lay his spirit or follow him to hell!”

Milly English spoke for the first time that night.

“No,” she said sharply. “No—no!”

“I dare you—I dare you all!” cried the duchesse in a deep voice, her arms still flung wide and her red mouth trembling a little. “One of us shall sleep this night in the haunted room. I put it to a vote. Let those who are afraid stay out of it, and we others shall draw lots to decide who rests to-night in Effizzi’s bed.”

“You are mad, Alice.”

Janet’s face was lifted to her as if in entreaty.

“It is a test—a test. Will not one of

these gallant knights conquer the ghost that harasses pretty ladies? Look, they are afraid—these gallants. There. Don't I sound exactly like Janet? I can talk like a novel, too—and I insist on playing ghosts." The duchesse, in the enjoyment of the others' nervousness, had forgotten her own. "Mr. Wheelwright I exempt, but from you others I crave a boon. Mr. Talley, Augustin de Loret, and my husband, will one of you not lay this ghost for me?"

De Loret rose from his chair with a bow.

"Duchesse, I should be delighted," he said.

The duchesse shook her head.

"You shall draw lots. Let fate decide. Remember, madness or death may wait for him who enters that room." From the fringe of the red Spanish shawl draped about her shoulders she pulled three threads and went to the great table with them held tightly in her closed fingers. "Here are three threads!" she cried in mock seriousness. "Draw, and he in whose hand kismet places the longest thread shall to-night confront Emanuele Effizzi."

The three men, laughing a little, now rose, and each one took from her hand a red thread.

"It is not I," said the duc, and he held up his thread, which was but half the length of the fringe on the shawl.

"One of you, then!" cried the duchesse, and, taking the thread from De Loret's hand, she held it to the light. Talley held up his beside it, and the two little red threads were measured. The duchesse turned to De Loret with a deep curtsy, holding the long thread in her hand, and cried:

"To you the honor, prince!"

II.

THE room in which Emanuele Effizzi had died was invested with none of the traditional horrors or discomforts with which the haunted rooms of fiction are so liberally sprinkled. There was no dirt, and no cobwebs hung from the walls, and no grim stone floors to echo with a hollow ring. The hangings were not old or torn or woven by a crazy hand into horrible devices of demons

and were-wolves; on the contrary, it was a very bright and pleasant room, hung with a gayly flowered brocade, furnished with old, softly faded gilt furniture, swimming in the light of dozens of wax candles and perfumed with roses instead of the legendary odor of rust and decay.

When Janet and her guests, the escorts of De Loret to the dainty room of his vigil, entered, the duchesse looked about her with some disappointment, and the others with some relief. De Loret, eying the box-spring mattress on the old bed, was exceedingly content, for he had pictured himself forced into spending a very disturbing night indeed, and although for the sake of posturing as a hero in Janet Wheelwright's eyes he was more than willing to spend a week in a damp cell with spiders, vermin and rats playing over his prostrate form, he drew a great sigh of relief when he saw that no greater test of his devotion was to be offered him than a night's sleep in that very comfortable-looking bed.

"But this is charming!" he cried. "Here I can welcome Signor Effizzi with all due respect for the proprieties. No dungeon, no cold underground chambers, no dismal rags piled on the cold floor for a couch. *Monsieur* will enjoy himself hugely!"

"Have you everything?" asked the duchesse. "I offer you a pistol, a Colt automatic, and my husband will be glad to lend you a rosary."

De Loret laughed.

"No, dear lady, your weapons are no protection against this ghost. One's only protection against it is a pure heart."

Janet looked at him with a new admiration in her eyes. To her, Prince Augustin de Loret had always been a title with a man unfortunately attached to it, but at his cheery defiance of a grim legend in the face of the fear which had shaken them all so short a time before, she was proud of him.

"The plan is this, Augustin," she said; "the old stories all say that the ghost appears between twelve and two to the man or woman with an evil heart who sleeps in this room. You stay here then and we will wait in the little boudoir that adjoins.

This door is the only entrance because this is a sort of little suite. There is a drawing-room that opens out of the boudoir and both rooms are cut off from the main hall. They have no exit except through here, so you see, none of us can leave or play any jokes without your seeing us. If you need us, for Heaven's sake call at once and as loudly as you can. We will be listening, and only if you give me your solemn promise, cross your heart, that you will cry out the minute you see, feel or hear anything the least bit threatening, will I consent to your staying here at all."

"Oh, you must promise to call us the second you see anything, even if it isn't threatening," added the duchesse. "If the ghost appears, even if he is a perfectly friendly old boy and you only drink a glass of wine with him—I am sure a ghost would enjoy a drink; probably been a long time since he had one, you know—why, I want to meet him. Imagine how piquant a flirtation one could have with a very wicked and very gorgeous Venetian, dead these two hundred years."

"You have everything now, I think," said Janet. "See, the windows on this side open on the garden, the front ones on to the canal, so if you leave them open you will hear the singing from the barges and the band playing in St. Mark's Square, and it will be—" Suddenly her words slurred into one horrified click in her throat.

"Oh, my God, listen!" Milly, her face haggard with terror, clutched Jim Talley's arm. Coming up the corridor that led by the haunted room they could hear steps approaching them slowly, light and stealthy, steps that hit the wood floor with a slight tap as though the feet which advanced nearer to them were shod as a goat's hoofs are shod.

Then, as suddenly as the slight, terrible noise had startled, it stopped and Jim Talley jumped to the door and threw it open.

There was no one in the hall.

"It has gone into one of those rooms," said Jim, meaning to be reassuring, but forgetting, in the horror of finding the hall quite empty, that he was not using the pronoun "he," but the terrible, the unthinkable word "it."

"No, it has not gone into one of those rooms," whispered Janet, her face so white that it seemed that all the blood in her body had drained into her red hair. "Both of the rooms on this wing are in disrepair and never used. They are locked."

They stood huddled at the door, their faces drawn with the intense concentration of listening. No eery sound came to them now, only the reassuring lap of the water from the canal and the drearily hideous whistle of a steam launch on its way to the railroad station. The shriek of the whistle broke the spell, and with a simultaneous impulse they moved away from the door and the sight of that empty hall and withdrew as far from one another as the narrow confines of the room allowed.

Each eyed his neighbor with distaste. They disliked each other. They had all been afraid and they had all showed it.

The duchesse broke the uneasy silence, though her voice had a quaver in it and her face, usually a little weary, was as pathetic as the face of a frightened child. "I think you are in luck, Augustin," she said. "Your ghost is out to-night," and opening the little painted door she stepped through into the brightly lit boudoir adjoining.

The others followed her, still enveloped in oppressive quiet. Janet was the last, and as she turned to follow them, she gave her hand to De Loret, standing stock still in the center of the floor.

"Don't stay in this room, I beg you," she murmured. "We have been fooling with a terrible power. I know, I know. I can feel it. There is something wrong with this room, something strong and wild and evil. And we have come in the wrong spirit. Please come away. I am afraid that something terrible will happen if you stay."

He shook his head and kissed her hands in silent dissent; she lingered longer than was strictly essential, then passed softly into the little room where the others waited and closed the door behind her.

III.

AUGUSTIN DE LORET, alone in the larger room, smiled faintly, thinking that his silent

good night had been more effective for this situation than any arrangement of brave words, and for the second time gazed about his bright surroundings contentedly, glad that this room was reassuringly beautiful. He was glad to be there, although his skepticism had fallen from him as a leaf falls in an autumn wind, when those horrible tapping footsteps had seemed to approach them. Now he reassured himself that the sound came from some natural cause, and had been magnified by nerves; that, after all, the terror was only the influence of the others. At any rate, he was established as a hero for no more intrepid deed than facing a ridiculous ghost in which he had not the faintest belief.

Crossing to the windows he made sure that they were open and the blinds arranged so that he could receive any random breath of air moving on this stifling night, and for a second he leaned against the low stone balustrade of the tiny balcony and looked down on the stone court fragrant with flowers and orange trees below him. The little courtyard was so peaceful and dark that he turned back to the bright room rather reluctantly.

Without pausing to undress, he blew out the candles, and feeling his way across the room, climbed on the bed and settled himself as comfortably as he could. When he stopped moving there was not a sound. Strangely quiet it was, with not a whisper coming from the five people waiting so close to him, not a creak from the old walls or a moan from the old furniture. The sad and mysterious groans and murmurings with which old houses settle themselves at night were all stilled.

For twenty minutes he lay listening, listening, without shifting his feet or moving his head, as motionless as the hot night. For twenty minutes, while eons of time crawled by he lay rigid. The silence wore on his nerves until finally the quiet and the heat and the heavy flower scents brought drowsiness. Relaxing, he settled himself on his bed with the natural gestures of sleepy men, turned over and was asleep.

It was nearly an hour before he awoke, and then he came quickly out of his slumber, for he was roused by a shudder, a long

quivering shudder, such as would go through a man if a snake crawled over his stomach. He was awake instantly, wide awake and feeling the atmosphere about him as keenly as he had ever felt heat and cold. The air seemed charged with power as it does sometimes before an electric storm and his skin was pricked by the vibrations filling the room.

In the darkness he waited, uneasy with the memory of that shudder, but not frightened, not at all panicky. It was quite dark and he could see nothing, and all was as quiet as it had been before he had fallen asleep, but now, all at once, he knew that coming toward him from the window was a creature, a thing. The faint light from the candle, too dim to distinguish objects by, but which enabled him to know the position of the windows, was not obliterated by any solid form, and there was not a sound of anything moving. But still he knew that something was coming nearer to him from the direction of the open windows. So conscious was he that it was advancing toward him, step by step, and very slowly, that he felt he could go to meet it, blind in the darkness, and put his hand on it and walk with it to his bed.

The atmosphere grew heavier as it came nearer. There was no tingle in the air now, only oppression, and his head felt heavy and ached, and as it came closer and closer he realized that this was a very evil thing which was advancing on him in the night. Then he knew that it was very near him and the feeling of evil was so strong that he felt that **evil as a physical thing**.

It became heavier. It seemed to fill the whole world. His brain and his heart and his lungs were filled with evil. He could taste it, he was breathing it, it pervaded him like a foul smell and he waited with sickening repulsion for the thing that emanated this horror to stand over him.

It came to the bottom of his bed and stopped and over him flowed waves of loathing and disgust. He loathed it, and disgust shook him, but as it stood there hate almost crowded out those strong emotions. He hated that thing as never he believed he could hate anything; terrible hate that shook him like an ague, and mingling with

this hate was the disgust that made his flesh creep and his bones seem to turn to jelly in his body. So weak was he made by this terrific hate that he could not spring into the darkness at his hate and yet he felt that death was preferable to failure to attempt to destroy that spirit.

As he lay on his bed, trembling with desire to destroy and too weak to move, a new sensation assailed him and this was so much more terrible than all the hate and the disgust and the loathing which had gone before that he prayed he might die. For it seemed to him that the spirit which stood over him was emptying him of his personality as one might empty a full bathtub.

His ego, his thoughts, his desires and his loves, his very soul were being drained away and he was empty, empty of himself, ready for this loathly ghoul to enter the shell of his body. Then slowly, when his ego was gone, came the terrific, the dreadful realization that it was he who was this *thing*. He was the loathed ghoul. The evil that filled the room so that he choked with it came from himself. The spirit had come to show him to himself; had drained him of the forces of his self-conceit and all the horror he had felt for a demon swept back to engulf him. He was that leprous breath of decay. He was that evil.

As he looked at himself for the first time in his life and saw in himself with horror all the hot desire to destroy, the spirit recoiled on him and his desire was as strong to destroy himself.

The strength flared back into his limbs, and with a yell of exaltation he sprang from the bed and ran to the open window, desperately eager to throw himself on the stones below. He was half over the little balcony before a strong hand seized and dragged him back to life.

Jim Talley had caught him and jerked him back into the room, alight now with a candelabra in Janet's hand, and when Talley saw De Loret's face he dropped him and stepped away from him, making with his hand the unconscious gesture of one who has touched something unclean.

Out of the night had come a force so strong that unseen and unheard it had had the power to force a self-indulgent fortune

hunter to attempt suicide. A force that had wiped the suavity and control from his face and left him with the lines of self-loathing and panic forever engraved there.

For the rest of his life no one would ever look at Prince Augustin de Loret without knowing that he was bad in motive, ruthless in desire, and that he despised himself. And those are not good things to have written on one's face. His eyes were touched with madness as might be the eyes of one who had gone too close to hell.

Janet stopped at the door, an anxious cry stilled on her lips, and saw his eyes for a second, and then with a sob she ran across the room to the arms and the plain, honest face of Jim Talley.

IV.

It was some years later, after Janet Wheelwright of the flaming hair had become Mrs. James Talley and had coerced the flaming spirit—own twin of the hair—within the dignified limitations set on matrons of position in a Middle Western city, that she was hostess at the most distinguished function she had given since her marriage. The town in which the Talleys lived had provided them some very merry and even gorgeous entertainments, and Janet had given some glittering ones herself. But, although she was vastly content to be plain Mrs. James Talley, Janet had retained all her old republican love of a title, so it was not until the arrival, by way of a lecture tour, of the eminent Italian scientist, the Marchese Alberto San Farino, that she had the human wherewithal to stage what she considered a distinguished party. Her husband's solid business men friends and their bridge playing wives, whatever else they might be, were hardly distinguished.

After all her trouble, that dinner came near to tragedy for Janet Talley. It was the marchese's fault, for the prized guest of honor, being deprived of the services of his interpreter, could neither speak nor understand English. True, that misfortune seemed to affect him not at all, but his austere silence—and it was austere, because one look at his face was proof positive that

even if he had known English he would not have spoken it—stood between the other guests and that loud jocularly which was etiquette for these diners-out. For another thing, they were a little ashamed of the marchese, even if he could not avoid his silence, for silence, forced or preferred, in that city was a thing abhorred.

In a word, before the first course of the dinner had been eaten, an uneasy conversation was being jerked from woman to woman, and long rents of silence gaped in the tapestry of their talk.

Janet from her end of the table was desperately throwing topics at her guests, praying that some one down the long table would have the wit to catch one, enrich it and throw it again, and trying, in her bad Italian to make the marchese talk to her. He was a remarkably quiet man, the marchese. Finally, in despair, she left them to their own dullnesses and devoted herself to this stiff lion who refused to roar even in his own tongue—and then, behold, life returned to that expiring effort.

"Marchese," said Janet, trying for the fifth time to make him unbend, "I do so admire men like you—men who do things, worth while things; men who create or who invent. I am a very humdrum sort of person, I fear—but I possess the great gift of admiration for such men. How marvelous you are!"

The marchese bowed.

Janet plunged on: "I have always wanted to create, myself. I always flattered myself that I might have written, but when one has this—" she waved her hand at the big dining room, sighing. "Even one's home is a burden at times."

The marchese said: "Often."

Janet, nothing daunted, continued:

"Yes, indeed it is—and poor me, I am tied to it when I am sure that I might have written. Why, once I made up a ghost story that so frightened a houseful of very sophisticated people that we nearly had a tragedy."

The marchese said: "Really?"

Janet remained quiet a second until she caught the reassured buzz from the rest of the table.

"It all happened at our house in Venice

before I was married," she went on. "I was giving a house party and the day the party arrived from Paris it was simply stifling hot and they were bored. So I told them a story to amuse them. I told them it was an old legend that I had heard about our house—and even if I did make it up out of my own head it was a very good story. Why, one of my guests tried to commit suicide after he heard it, and all the rest left for Paris the next day; all except my husband, yonder. He was the only one who had the courage to stay. Don't you think that was remarkable?"

The marchese showed the first signs of interest he had deigned to display that night. He twisted about in his seat and faced her. The buzz of conversation from the rest of the table reached a crescendo and flowed happily on.

"Will you tell me the name of your house in Venice?" asked the marchese. "I know Venice very well for I have many relatives there. I am exceedingly interested."

"It is called the Palazzo Effizzi," Janet was glowing now.

"Ah," said the marchese. "And will you tell me the story that so frightened your guests?"

"I invented a very wicked, very gorgeous Effizzi and I told my guests that to expiate his sins he haunted the old house and drove away any wicked soul who might enter it. I don't know how a ghost should look and I was afraid that if I tried to describe him he wouldn't be terrible enough to be convincing so I told them that no one had ever seen him, but that this invisible terror invested one of our best guest rooms and that several persons had been driven to suicide from there. I think that was a good ghost story, don't you?"

"And what happened exactly?" asked the marchese.

"One of the men, for a lark you understand, decided to spend the night there. The rest kept watch in an adjoining room. Believe me or not, so well had I told my story that the man—and he wasn't a boy, but a very sophisticated man of the world—became so frightened when he was left alone in the dark that he tried to jump out of the window. My husband caught him—

and I have never tried to tell any more ghost stories!"

"And did you never feel anything strange in the Palazzo Effizzi?" asked the marchese.

Janet was startled. She looked at the marchese for a minute with a puzzled look in her eyes.

"Anything strange?" she said. "Why—no—no—it was strange that my guest should try to jump out of the window because of a story; and that night—well, we all seemed to feel—something—a force in the house; but that was the effect of the story and the heat, of course. To be sure, there was a loose rafter or something under the floor which insisted on making a noise like some one walking in one of the halls. Tell me, marchese, was there a wicked Effizzi? When I think back now, I believe that perhaps I was not so inventive. Is there anything wrong with the house on the Grand Canal? Was there something evil—in that house? Sometimes I did seem to feel something—a queer feeling—a sensation that there was some one in the room with me who was invisible but terribly forceful. I felt it often, although I used to tell myself it was only my imagination, and so it really

never bothered me. I mean it never manifested itself to me. But the house seemed to—well, brood. I felt sometimes as though those old walls were nursing a grievance."

"*Madame*," he said, "I know well the history of the Effizzi family. They were very commonplace people; they still are quite commonplace—charitable and kind and devout. The founder of the family was a money-lender; the line after him have all been bankers, or were until they sank in fortune. They now are quite poor. But always they have been—how do you say it—matter-of-fact business men. No, the house has no sinister history."

"But why—" She hesitated.

"Ah, *madame*," said the Italian, "did it never occur to you we are our own haunted houses—that the ghosts which walk within us are sometimes but the shadows of our own baser selves?"

Pondering his words she gazed thoughtfully down the long table until she caught her husband's smile.

"Ah, well, marchese," she cried then, "ghost or no ghost, certainly I made up a good story and always I shall owe a debt to a house on the Grand Canal!"



THE MODERN LOCHINVAR

WHEN young Lochinvar rode out from the West,
He claimed that his automobile was the best;
It was painted dark red and it brilliantly shone.
He went like a streak and he rode all alone;
He shot over ruts with a zip and a jar,
And people fled madly from young Lochinvar.

With a whirl of his wheels and a hum of his cogs,
He knocked down the children and ran over dogs;
He frightened the horses and laughed at their pranks,
And men who got angry he looked on as cranks;
He gave her the very last notch on the bar,
And a cloud of dust followed the gay Lochinvar.

He stayed not at bridges, he stopped not for stone,
He calmly took all of the roads as his own,
Till he came to a crossing and smashed through a gate
And endeavored to butt through a train load of freight—
They searched, and at last, lying under a car,
They found a few chunks of the bold Lochinvar.



The Three Hostages.

By JOHN BUCHAN

Author of "Greenmantle," etc.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIR ARCHIBALD PUTS HIS FOOT IN IT.

THREE minutes later I was back in the curiosity shop. I switched off my light and very gently opened the street door. There was a sound of footsteps on the pavement, so I drew back till they had passed. Then I emerged into the quiet street, with Abel's little brazier glowing in front of me, and Abel's little sharp face poked out of his pent house.

"All right, sir?" he asked cheerfully.

"All right," I said. "I have found what I wanted."

"There was a party turned up not long after you had gone in. Lucky I had locked the door after you. He wasn't inside more than five minutes. A party with a black

topcoat turned up at the collar—respectable party he looked—oldish—he might have been a curate. Funny thing, sir, but I kind of knew when you were coming back and had the door unlocked ready for you. If you've done with me I'll clear off."

"Can you manage alone?" I asked. "There's a good deal to tidy up."

He winked solemnly. "In an hour there won't be no sign of nothing. I've got my little ways of doing things. Good night, sir, and thank you." He was like a boots seeing a guest off from a hotel.

I found that the time was just after half past eleven, so I walked to Tottenham Court Road and picked up a taxi, telling the man to drive to Great Charles Street in Westminster. Mary was in London, and I must see her at once. She had chosen to

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take a hand in the game, probably at Sandy's instigation, and I must find out what exactly she was doing. The business was difficult enough already, with Sandy following his own trail, and me forbidden to get into touch with him, but if Mary was also on the job it would be naked chaos unless I knew her plans.

I own I felt miserably nervous. There was nobody in the world whose wisdom I put higher than hers, and I would trust her to the other side of Tophet, but I hated to think of a woman mixed up in something so ugly and perilous. She was far too young and lovely to be safe on the back stairs. And yet I remembered that she had been in uglier affairs before this, and I recalled old Blenkiron's words: "She can't scare and she can't soil."

And then I began to get a sort of comfort from the feeling that she was along with me in the game; it made me feel less lonely. But it was pretty rough luck on Peter John. Anyhow I must see her, and I argued that she would probably be staying with her Wymondham aunts, and that in any case I could get news of her there.

The Misses Wymondham were silly ladies, but their butler would have made Montmartre respectable. He and I had always got on well, and I think the only thing that consoled him when Fosse was sold was that Mary and I were to have it. The house in Great Charles Street was one of those tremendously artistic new dwellings with which the intellectual plutocracy had adorned the Westminster slums.

"Is her ladyship home yet?" I asked.

"No, Sir Richard, but she said she wouldn't be late. I expect her any moment."

"Then I think I'll come in and wait. How are you, Barnard? Found your city legs yet?"

"I am improving, Sir Richard, I thank you. Very pleased to have Miss Mary here, if I may take the liberty of so speaking of her. Miss Claire is in Paris still, and Miss Wymondham is dancing to-night, and won't be back till very late. How are things at Fosse, sir, if I may make so bold? And how is the young gentleman? Miss Mary has shown me his photograph. A

very handsome young gentleman, sir, and favors yourself."

"Nonsense, Barnard. He's the living image of his mother. Get me a drink like a good fellow. A tankard of beer, if you have it, for I've a throat like a grindstone."

I drank the beer and waited in a little room which would have been charming but for the garish color scheme which Mary's aunts had on the brain. I was feeling quite cheerful again, for Peter John's photograph was on the mantelpiece, and I reckoned that any minute Mary might be at the doorway.

She came in just before midnight. I heard her speak to Barnard in the hall, and then her quick step outside the door. She was preposterously dressed, but she must have done something to her face in the taxi, for the paint was mostly rubbed from it, leaving it very pale.

"Oh, Dick, my darling," she cried, tearing off her cloak and running to my arms. "I never expected you. There's nothing wrong at home?"

"Not that I know of, except that it's deserted. Mary, what on earth brought you here?"

"You're not angry, Dick?"

"Not a bit—only curious."

"How did you know I was here?"

"Guessed. I thought it the likeliest cover to draw. You see I've been watching you dancing to-night. Look here, my dear, if you put so much paint and powder on your face, and jam it so close to old Turpin's chest, it won't be easy for the poor fellow to keep his shirt front clean."

"You—watched—me—dancing! Were you in that place?"

"Well, I wouldn't say *in* it. But I had a prospect of the show from the gallery. And it struck me that the sooner we met and had a talk the better."

"The gallery! Were you in the house? I don't understand."

"No more do I. I burgled a certain house in a back street for very particular reasons of my own. In the process I may mention that I got one of the worst frights of my life. After various adventures I came to a place where I heard the dickens of a row which I made out to be dance mu-

sic. Eventually I found a dirty little room with a window, and to my surprise looked down on a dancing hall. I know it, for I had once been there with Archie Roylance. That was queer enough, but imagine my surprise when I saw my wedded wife, raddled like a geisha, dancing with an old friend who seemed to have got himself up to imitate a wax work."

She seemed scarcely to be listening. "But in the house! Did you see no one?"

"I saw one man and I heard another. The fellow I saw was a man I once met in the small hours with Medina."

"But the other? You didn't see him? You didn't hear him go out?"

"No." I was puzzled at her excitement. "Why are you so keen about the other?"

"Because I think—I'm sure—it was Sandy—Colonel Arbuthnot."

This was altogether beyond me. "Impossible!" I cried. "The place is a lair of Medina's. The man I saw was Medina's servant or satellite. Do you mean to say that Sandy has been exploring that house?"

She nodded. "You see it is the Fields of Eden."

"Oh, I know. I found that out for myself. Do you tell me that Sandy discovered it too?"

"Yes. That is why I was there. That is why I have been living a perfectly hideous life and am now dressed like a chorus girl."

"Mary," I said solemnly, "my fine brain won't support any more violent shocks. Will you please to sit down beside me and give me the plain tale of all you have been doing since I said good-by to you at Fosse?"

"First," she said, "I had a visit from a dramatic critic on holiday, Mr. Alexander Thomson. He said he knew you, and that you had suggested that he should call. He came three times to Fosse, but only once to the house. Twice I met him in the woods. He told me a good many things, and one was that he couldn't succeed, and you couldn't succeed, unless I helped. He thought that if a woman were lost only a woman could find her. In the end he persuaded me. You said yourself, Dick, that Nanny was quite competent to take charge

of Peter John, with Dr. Greenslade so close at hand. And I hear from her every day, and he is very well and happy."

"You came to London. But when?"

"The day you came back from Norway."

"But I've been having letters regularly from you since then."

"That is my little arrangement with Paddock. I took him into my confidence. I send him the letters in batches and he posts one daily."

"Then you've been here more than a fortnight. Have you seen Sandy?"

"Twice. He has arranged my life for me, and has introduced me to my dancing partner, the Marquis de la Tour du Pin, whom you call Turpin. I think I have had the most horrible, the most wearing time that any woman ever had. I have moved in raffish circles and have had to be the most raffish of the lot. Do you know, Dick, I believe I'm really a good actress? I have acquired a metallic voice, and a high, silly laugh, and hard eyes, and when I lie in bed at night I blush all over for my shamelessness. I know you hate it, but you can't hate it more than I do. But it had to be done. I couldn't be a 'piker,' as Mr. Blenkiron used to say."

"Any luck?"

"Oh, yes," she said wearily. "I have found Miss Victor. It wasn't very difficult, really. When I had made friends with the funny people that frequent these places it wasn't hard to see who was different from the other. They're all manikins, but the one I was looking for was bound to be the most manikinish of the lot. I wanted some one without mind or soul, and I found her. Besides, I had a clew to start with. Odell, you know."

"It was the green girl."

She nodded. "I couldn't be certain of course, till I had her lover to help me. Oh, he is a good man, your French marquis. He has played his part splendidly. You see, it would never do to try to *awake* Adela Victor now. We couldn't count on her being able to keep up appearances without arousing suspicion till the day of release arrived. But something had to be done, and that is my business especially. I have

made friends with her, and I talk to her and I have attached her to me just a little, like a dog. That will give me a chance to do the rest quickly when the moment comes. You cannot bring back a vanished soul all at once unless you have laid some foundation. We have to be very, very careful, for she is keenly watched, but I think—yes, I am sure—it is going well.”

“Oh, bravo!” I cried. “That makes Number Two. I may tell you that I have got Number One.”

I gave her a short account of my doings in Norway. “Two of the poor devils will get out of the cage anyhow. I wonder if it wouldn’t be possible to pass a word to Victor and the duke. It would relieve their anxiety.”

“I thought of that,” she replied, “but Colonel Arbuthnot says no, on no account. He says it might ruin everything. He takes a very solemn view of the affair, you know. And so do I. I have seen Mr. Medina.”

“Where?” I asked in astonishment.

“I got Aunt Doria to take me to a party where he was to be present. Oh, don’t be worried. I wasn’t introduced to him, and he never heard my name. But I watched him and, knowing what I did, I was more afraid than I have ever been in my life. He is extraordinarily attractive—no, not attractive—seductive, and he is as cold and hard as chilled steel. You know those impressions I get of people which I can’t explain—you say they are always right. Well, I felt him almost superhuman. He exhales ease and power like a god, but it is a god from a lost world. I can see that like a god, too, it is souls that he covets. Ordinary human badness seems decent in comparison with that Lucifer’s pride of his. I think, if I ever could commit murder, it would be his life I would take. I should feel like Charlotte Corday—oh, I am dismally afraid of him.”

“I’m not,” I said stoutly, “and I see him at closer quarters than most people.”

The measure of success we had attained was beginning to make me confident.

“Colonel Arbuthnot is afraid for you,” she said. “The two times I have seen him in London he kept harping on the need of your keeping very near to him. I think

he meant me to tell you. He says that when you are fighting a man with a long-range weapon the only chance is to hug him. Dick, didn’t you tell me that Mr. Medina suggested that you should stay in his house? I have been thinking a lot about that, and I believe it would be the safest plan. Once he saw you secure in his pocket he might forget about you.”

“It would be most infernally awkward, for I should have no freedom of movement. But all the same, I believe you are right. Things may grow very hectic as we get near the day.”

“Besides, you might find out something about Number Three. Oh, Dick, it is the little boy that breaks my heart. The others might escape on their own account—some-day, but unless we find *him* he is lost forever. And Colonel Arbuthnot says that, even if we found him, it might be hard to restore the child’s mind. Unless—unless—”

Mary’s face had become grim, if one could use the word of a thing so soft and gentle. Her hands were tightly clasped, and her eyes had a strained far-away look.

“I am going to find him,” she cried. “Listen, Dick. That man despises women and rules them out of his life, except in so far as he can make tools of them. But there is one woman who is going to stop at nothing to beat him. When I think of that little David, I grow mad and desperate. I am afraid of myself. Have you no hope to give me?”

“I haven’t the shadow of a clew,” I said dolefully. “Has Sandy none?”

She shook her head. “He is so small, the little fellow, and so easy to hide.”

“If I were in Central Africa, I should get Medina by the throat, and peg him down and torture him till he disgorged.”

Again she shook her head. “Those primitive methods are useless here. He would laugh at you, for he isn’t a coward—at least I think not. Besides, he is certain to be magnificently guarded. And for the rest, he has the entrenchments of his reputation and popularity, and a quicker brain than any of us. He can put a spell of blindness on the world—on all men and nearly all women.”

The arrival of Miss Wymondham made

me get up to leave. She was still the same odd-looking woman, with a mass of tow-colored hair piled above her long white face. She had been dancing somewhere, and looked at once dog-tired and excited.

"Mary has been having such a good time," she told me. "Even I can scarcely keep pace with her ardent youth. Can't you persuade her to bob her hair? The present arrangement is so *demodé* and puts her whole figure out of drawing. Nancy Travers was speaking about it only to-night. Properly turned out, she said, Mary would be the most ravishing thing in London. By the way, I saw your friend Archie Roylance at the Parinters. He is lunching here on Thursday. Will you come, Richard?"

I told her that my plans were vague and that I thought I might be out of town. But I arranged with Mary before I left to keep me informed at the club of any news that came from Sandy. As I walked back I was infected by her distress over little David Warcliff. That was the most grievous business of all, and I saw no light in it, for though everything else happened according to plan, we should never be able to bring Medina to book.

The more I thought of it the more hopeless our case against him seemed to be. We might free the hostages, but we could never prove that he had anything to do with them. I could give damning evidence, to be sure, but who would take my word against his? And I had no one to confirm me. Supposing I indicted him for kidnaping and told the story of what I knew about the Blind Spinner and Newhover and Odell? He and the world would simply laugh at me, and I should probably have to pay heavy damages for libel. None of his satellites, I was certain, would ever give him away; they couldn't, even if they wanted to, for they didn't know anything. No, Sandy was right. We might have a measure of success, but there would be no victory. And yet, only victory would give us full success, for only to get him on his knees, gibbering with terror, would restore the poor little boy. I strode through the empty streets with a sort of hopeless fury in my heart.

One thing puzzled me. What was Sandy doing in that house behind the curiosity

shop, if indeed, it was Sandy? Whoever had been there had been in league with the sad gray man whom I watched from behind the bedroom door. Now the man was part of Medina's entourage: I had no doubt about the accuracy of my recollection. Had Sandy dealings with some one inside the enemy's citadel? I didn't see how that was possible, for he had told me that he was in deadly danger from Medina, and that his only chance was to make him believe that he was out of Europe. As I went to bed, one thing was very clear in my mind. If Medina asked me to stay with him, I would accept. It would probably be safer, though I wasn't so much concerned about that, and it would possibly be more fruitful. I might find out something about the gray man.

Next day I went to see Medina, for I wanted him to believe that I couldn't keep away from him. He was in tremendous spirits about something or other, and announced that he was going off to the country for a couple of days. He made me stay to luncheon, when I had another look at Odell, who seemed to be getting fat.

"Your wind, my lad," I said to myself, "can't be as good as it should be. You wouldn't have my money in a scrap."

I hoped that Medina was going to have a holiday, for he had been doing a good deal lately in the way of speaking, but he said: "No such luck." He was going down to the country on business—an estate of which he was a trustee wanted looking into. I asked in what part of England, and he said Shropshire. He liked that neighborhood and had an idea of buying a place there when he had more leisure.

Somehow, that led me to speak of his poetry. He was surprised to learn that I had been studying the little books, and I could see took it as a proof of my devotion. I made a few fulsome observations on their merits, and said that even an ignorant fellow like me could see how dashed good they were. I also remarked that they seemed to me a trifle melancholy.

"Melancholy!" he said. "It's a foolish world, Hannay, and a wise man must have his moods of contempt. Victory loses some of its salt when it is won over fools."

And then he said what I had been waiting for. "I told you weeks ago that I wanted you to take up your quarters with me. Well, I repeat the offer and will take no refusal."

"It is most awfully kind of you," I stammered. "But wouldn't I be in the way?"

"Not in the least. You see the place—it's as large as a barracks. I'll be back from Shropshire by Friday, and I expect you to move in here on Friday evening. We might dine together."

I was content, for it gave me a day or two to look about me. Medina went off that afternoon, and I spent a restless evening. I wanted to be with Mary, but it seemed to me that the less I saw of her the better. She was going her own way, and if I showed myself in her neighborhood it might ruin all. Next day was no better; I actually longed for Medina to return so that I might feel I was doing something, for there was nothing I could turn my hand to, and when I was idle the thought of David Warcliff was ever present to torment me. I went out to Hampton Court and had a long row on the river; then I dined at the club and sat in the little back smoking room, avoiding any one I knew, and trying to read a book of travels in Arabia. I fell asleep in my chair, and, waking about half past eleven, was staggering off to bed, when a servant came to tell me I was wanted on the telephone.

It was Mary; she was speaking from Great Charles Street, and her voice was sharp with alarm.

"There's been an awful mishap, Dick," she said breathlessly. "Are you alone? You're sure there's no one there. Archie Roylance has made a dreadful mess of things. He came to that dancing place to-night, and Adela Victor was there, and Odell with her. He had seen her before, you know, and apparently was much attracted. No! He didn't recognize me, for when I saw him I kept out of range. But of course he recognized the Marquis.

"He danced with Adela, and I suppose he talked nonsense to her—anyhow he made himself conspicuous. The result was that Odell proposed to take her away—I suppose he was suspicious of anybody of

Archie's world—and, well, there was a row. The place was very empty—only about a dozen, and mostly a rather bad lot. Archie asked what right he had to carry off the girl, and lost his temper, and the manager was called in—the man with the black beard. He backed up Odell, and then Archie did a very silly thing. He said he was Sir Archibald Roylance, and wasn't going to be dictated to by any dance hall keeper, and, worse, he said his friend was the Marquis de la Tour du Pin, and that between them they would burst up this show, and that he wasn't going to have a poor girl ordered about by a third-rate bully. I don't know what happened afterward. The women were hustled out, and I had to go with the rest. But Dick, it's bad trouble. I'm not afraid so much for Archie, though he has probably got a mauling, but the marquis—they're sure to know who he is, and all about him, and remember his connection with Adela. They're almost certain to make sure in some horrible way that he can't endanger them again."

"Lord," I groaned, "what a catastrophe! And what on earth can I do? I daren't take any part!"

"No," came a hesitating voice. "I suppose not. But you can warn the marquis if nothing has happened to him already."

"Precious poor chance. These fellows don't waste time. Go to bed and sleep, my dear. I'll do my best."

My best at that time of night was pretty feeble. I rang up Victor, and found, as I expected, that Turpin had not returned. Then I rang up Archie's house in Grosvenor Street and got the same answer about him. It was no good my going off to the back streets of Marylebone, so I went to bed and spent a wretched night.

Very early next morning I was in Grosvenor Street, and there I had news. Archie's man had just had a telephone message from a hospital to say that his master had had an accident, and would he bring clothes. He packed a bag, and he and I drove there at once, and found the miserable Archie in bed, the victim officially of a motor accident. He did not seem to be very bad, but it was a rueful face, much battered about the eyes and

bandaged as to the jaw, which was turned on me when the nurse left us.

"You remember what I said about the pug in the checked suit." He whistled through damaged teeth. "Well, I took him on last night and got tidily laid out. I'm not up to professional standards, and my game leg made me slow."

"You've put your foot into it most nobly," I said grimly. "What do you mean by brawling in a dance club? You've embarrassed me horribly in the job I'm on."

"But how?" he asked, and but for the bandage his jaw would have dropped.

"Never mind how at present. I want to know exactly what happened. It's more important than you think."

He told me much the same story that I had heard from Mary, but much garlanded with objurgations. He denied that he had dined too well—"nothing but a small whisky and soda and one glass of port." He had been looking for the girl in green for some time, and having found her, was not going to miss the chance of making her acquaintance.

"A melancholy little being with nothin' to say for herself. She's had hard usage from some swine—you could see it by her eyes—and I expect the pug's the villain. Anyway, I wasn't goin' to stand his orderin' her about like a slave. So I told him so, and a beaver with a black beard chipped in and they began to hustle me. Then I did a silly thing. I tried to solemnize 'em by sayin' who I was, and old Turpin was there, so I dragged his name in. Dashed caddish thing to do, but I thought a marquis would put the wind up that crowd."

"Did he join in?"

"I don't know—I rather fancy he got scragged at the start. Anyhow I found myself facin' the pug, seein' bright red, and inclined to fight a dozen. I didn't last for more than one round. My game leg cramped me, I suppose. I got in one or two on his ugly face, and then I suppose I took a knock-out. After that I don't remember anything till I woke up in this bed feelin' as if I had been through a mangle.

"The people here say I was brought in by two bobbies and a fellow with a motor

car, who said I had walked slap into his bonnet at a street corner and hurt my face. He was very concerned about me, but omitted to leave his name and address. Very thoughtful of the sweeps to make sure there would be no scandal. I say, Dick, you don't suppose this will get into the newspapers? I don't want to be placarded as havin' been in such a vulgar shindy just as I'm thinkin' of goin' in for Parliament."

"I don't think there's the remotest chance of your hearing another word about it, unless you talk too much yourself. Look here, Archie, you've got to promise me never to go near that place again, and never on any account whatever to go hunting for that girl in green. I'll tell you my reasons some day, but you can take it that they're good ones. Another thing. You've got to keep out of Turpin's way. I only hope you haven't done him irreparable damage along of your idiocy last night."

Archie was desperately penitent. "I know I behaved like a cad. I'll go and grovel to old Turpin as soon as they let me up. But he's all right; sure to be. He wasn't lookin' for a fight like me. I expect he only got shoved into the street and couldn't get back again."

I did not share Archie's optimism, and very soon my fear was a certainty. I went straight from the hospital to Carlton House Terrace, and found Mr. Victor at breakfast. I learned that the Marquis de la Tour du Pin had been dining out on the previous evening and had not returned.

CHAPTER XV.

FRENCH NOBLEMAN DISCOVERS FEAR.

I HAVE twice heard from Turpin the story I am going to set down—once before he understood much of it, a second time when he had got some enlightenment—but I doubt whether to his dying day he will ever be perfectly clear about what happened to him.

I have not had time to introduce Turpin properly, and in any case I am not sure that the job is not beyond me. My liking for the French is profound, but I believe there

is no race on earth which the average Briton is less qualified to comprehend. For myself, I could far more easily get inside the skin of a German. I knew he was as full of courage as a berserker, pretty mad, but with that queer code of prudence which your Latin possesses, and which in the long run makes his madness less dangerous than an Englishman's. He was high strung, excitable, imaginative, and I should have said in a general way very sensitive to influences such as Medina wielded.

But he was forewarned. Mary had told him the main lines of the business, and he was playing the part she had set him as dutifully as a good child. I had not done justice to his power of self-control. He saw his sweetheart leading that blind un-earthly life, and it must have been torture to him to do nothing except look on. But he never attempted to wake her memory, but waited obediently till Mary gave orders, and played the part to perfection of the ordinary half-witted dancing mountebank.

When the row with Archie started and the scurry began, he had the sense to see that he must keep out of it. Then he heard Archie speak his real name, and saw the mischief involved in that, for nobody knew him except Mary, and he had passed as a M. Claud Simond from Buenos Aires. When he saw his friend stand up to the bruiser, he started off instinctively to his help, but stopped in time and turned to the door. The man with the black beard was looking at him, but said nothing.

There seemed to be a good deal of racket at the foot of the stairs. One of the girls caught his arm.

"No good that way," she whispered. "It's a raid all right. There's another road out. You don't want your name in tomorrow's papers."

He followed her into a little side passage, which was almost empty and very dark, and there he lost her. He was just starting to prospect, when he saw a little man whom he at once recognized as one of the bartenders.

"Up the stairs, *monsieur*," the man said. "Then first to the left and down again. You come out in the yard of the Apollo

Garage. Quick, *monsieur*, or the cops will be here."

Turpin sped up the steep wooden stairs, and found himself in another passage fairly well lit, with a door at each end. He took the one to the left, and dashed through, wondering how he was to recover his hat and coat, and also what had become of Mary. The door opened easily enough, and in his haste he took two steps forward. It swung behind him, so that he was in complete darkness, and he turned back to open it again to give him light. But it would not open. With the shutting of that door he walked clean out of the world.

At first he was angry, and presently, when he realized his situation, a little alarmed. The place seemed to be small; it was utterly dark, and as stuffy as the inside of a safe. His chief thought at the moment was that it would never do for him to be caught in a raid or a dance club, for his true name might come out and the harm which Archie's foolish tongue had wrought might be thereby aggravated. But soon he saw that he had stepped out of one kind of danger into what was probably a worse. He was locked in an infernal cupboard in a house which he knew to have the most unholy connections.

He started to grope around, and found that the place was larger than he thought. The walls were bare, the floor seemed to be of naked boards, and there was not a stick of furniture anywhere, nor, so far as he could see, any window.

He could not discover the door he had entered by, which on the inside must have been finished dead level with the walls. Presently he found that his breathing was difficult, and that almost put him in a panic, for the dread of suffocation had always been for him the private funk from which the bravest man is not free. To breathe was like having his face tightly jammed against a pillow. He made an effort and controlled himself, for he realized that if he let himself get hysterical he would only suffocate the faster.

Then he declared that he felt a hand pressing on his mouth. It must have been imagination, for he admits that the place was empty. But all the same, the hand

came again and again—a large, soft hand smelling of roses. His nerves began to scream, and his legs to give under him. The roses came down on him in a cloud, and that horrible flabby hand, as big as a hill, seemed to smother him. He tried to move, to get away from it, and before he knew he found himself on his knees. He struggled to get up, but the hand was on him, flattening him out, and that intolerable sweet, sickly odor swathed him in its nauseous folds. And then he lost consciousness.

How long he was senseless he doesn't know, but he thinks it must have been a good many hours. When he came to, he was no longer in that horrible cupboard; he was lying on what seemed to be a couch in a room which felt spacious, for he could breathe freely; but it was still as black as the nether pit. He had a blinding headache and felt rather sick and as silly as an owl. He could not remember how he had come there, but as his hand fell on his shirt front and he realized he was in dress clothes, he recollected Archie's cry.

That was the last clear thing in his head, but it steadied him, for it reminded him how grave was his danger. He has told me that at first he was half stifled with panic, for he was feeling abominably weak; but he had just enough reason left in him to let him take a pull on his nerves. "You must be a man," he repeated to himself. "Even if you have stumbled into hell, you must be a man."

Then a voice spoke out of the darkness, and at the sound of it most of his fright disappeared. It was no voice that he knew, but a pleasant voice, and it spoke to him in French. Not ordinary French, you understand, but the French of his native valley in the south, with the soft alluring patois of his home. It seemed to drive away his headache and nausea, and to soothe every jangled nerve, but it made him weaker. Of that he has no doubt. This friendly voice was making him a child again.

His memory of what it said is hopelessly vague. He thinks that it reminded him of the life of his boyhood—the old château high in a fold of the limestone hills, the feathery chestnuts in the valley bottom,

the clear pools where the big trout lived, the snowy winters when the wolves came out of the forests to the farmyard doors, the hot summers when the roads were blinding white, and the turf on the downs grew as yellow as corn. The memory of it was all jumbled, and whatever the voice said its effect was more like music than spoken words. It smoothed out the creases in his soul, but it stole also the manhood from him. He was becoming limp and docile and passive like a weak child.

The voice stopped, and he felt a powerful inclination to sleep. Then suddenly, between sleeping and waking, he became aware of a light, a star which glowed ahead of him in the darkness. It waxed and then waned, and held his eyes like a vise. At the back of his head he knew that there was some devilry in the business, that it was something which he ought to resist, but for the life of him he could not remember why.

The light broadened till it was like the circle which a magic lantern makes on a screen. Into the air there crept a strange scent—not the sickly smell of roses, but a hard pungent smell which tantalized him with its familiarity. Where had he met it before? Slowly out of it there seemed to shape a whole world of memories.

Now, Turpin before the war had put in some years' service in Africa with the Armée Coloniale as a lieutenant of Spahis, and had gone with various engineering and military expeditions south of the Algerian frontier into the desert. He used to rave to me about the glories of those lost days, that first youth of a man which does not return. This smell was the desert—that unforgettable, untamable thing which stretches from the Mediterranean to the Central African forests, the place where, in the days when it was sea, Ulysses wandered, and where the magic of Circe and Calypso, for all the world knows, may still linger.

In the moon of light a face appeared, a face so strongly lit up that every grim and subtle line of it was magnified. It was an Eastern face—a lean, high-boned Arab face, with the eyes set in a strange slant. He had never seen it before, but he had

met something like it when he had dabbled in the crude magic of the sands, the bubbling pot, and the green herb fire. At first it was only a face, half averted, and then it seemed to move so that the eyes appeared like lights suddenly turned on at night as one looks from outside at a dark house.

He felt in every bone a thing he had almost forgotten—the magic and the terror of the desert. It was a cruel and inhuman face, hiding God knows what of ancient horror and sin, but wise as the sphinx and eternal as the rocks. As he stared at it the eyes seemed to master and envelop him, and, as he put it, suck the soul out of him.

You see, he had never been told about Kharāma. That was the one mistake Mary made, and a very natural one, for it was not likely that he and the Indian would foregather. So he had nothing in his poor muddle-head to help him to combat this mastering presence. He didn't try. He said he felt himself sinking into a delicious lethargy, like the coma which overtakes a man who is being frozen to death.

I could get very little out of Turpin about what happened next. The face spoke to him, but whether in French or some African tongue he didn't know—French, he thought; certainly not English. I gather that while the eyes and the features were to the last degree awe-inspiring, the voice was if anything friendly. It told him that he was in instant danger, and that the only hope lay in utter impassivity. If he attempted to exercise his own will he was doomed, and there was sufficient indication of what that doom meant to shake his lethargy into spasms of childish fear.

"Your body is too feeble to move," said the voice, "for Allah has laid his hand on it." Sure enough, Turpin realized that he hadn't the strength of a kitten. "You have surrendered your will to Allah till he restores it to you." That also was true, for Turpin knew he could not summon the energy to brush his hair unless he was ordered to. "You will be safe," said the voice, "so long as you sleep. You will sleep till I bid you awake."

Sleep he probably did, for once again came a big gap in his consciousness. The next he knew he was being jolted in some-

thing that ran on wheels, and he suddenly rolled over on his side, as the vehicle took a sharp turn. This time it didn't take him quite so long to wake up. He found he was in a big motor car, with his overcoat on, and his hat on the seat beside him. He was stretched out almost at full length, and comfortably propped up with cushions. All this he realized fairly soon, but it was some time before he could gather up the past, and then it was all blurred and sketchy. What he remembered most clearly was the warning that he was in grave peril and was only safe while he did nothing. That was burned in on his mind, and the lesson was pointed by the complete powerlessness of his limbs. He could hardly turn over from his side to his back, and he knew that if he attempted to stand he would fall down in a heap. He shut his eyes and tried to think.

Bit by bit the past pieced itself together. He remembered Archie's cry—and things before that—Mary—the girl in green. Very soon the truth smote him in his face. He had been kidnaped like the rest, and had had the same tricks played on him. But they had only affected his body. As he realized this tremendous fact, Turpin swelled with pride. Some devilry had stolen his physical strength, but his soul was his own still, his memory and his will.

A sort of miasma of past fear still clung about him, like the aftertaste of influenza, but this only served to make him angry. He was most certainly not going to be beaten. The swine had miscalculated this time; they might have a cripple in their hands, but it would be a very watchful, wary and determined cripple, quick to seize the first chance to be even with them. His anger made his spirits rise. All his life he had been a man of tropical loves and tempestuous hates. He had loathed the boche and Free Masons and communists, and the deputies of his own land, and ever since Adela's disappearance he had nursed a fury against a person or persons unknown; but now every detestation of which he was capable had been focused against those who were responsible for this night's work. The fools! They thought they had got a trussed sheep, when all the time it was a lame tiger.

The blinds of the car were down, but by small painful movements he managed to make out that there was a man in the front seat beside the chauffeur. By and by he got a corner of the right-hand blind raised, and saw that it was night time and that they were moving through broad streets that looked like a suburb. From the beat of the engine he gathered that the car was a Rolls-Royce, but not, he thought, one of the latest models.

Presently the motion became less regular, and he realized that the suburban streets were giving place to country roads. His many expeditions in his Delage had taught him a good deal about the ways out of London, but, try as he might, he could not pick up any familiar landmark. The young moon had set, so he assumed that it was near midnight; it was a fine, clear night, not very dark, and he picked up an occasional inn and church, but they never seemed to pass through any village. Probably the driver was taking the less frequented roads—a view he was confirmed in by the frequent right-angled turns and the many patches of indifferent surface.

Very soon he found his efforts at reconnaissance so painful that he gave them up, and contented himself with planning his policy. Of course he must play the part of the witless sheep. That duty, he thought, presented no difficulties, for he rather fancied himself as an actor. The trouble was his bodily condition. He did not believe that a constitution as good as his could have taken any permanent damage from the night's work. The night's! He must have been away for more than one night, for the row with Archie had taken place very near twelve o'clock. This must be the mid-night following.

He wondered what Mr. Victor was thinking about it—and Mary—and Hannay. The miserable Hannay had now four lost ones to look for instead of three! Anyhow, the devils had got an ugly prisoner in him. His body must soon be all right, unless of course they took steps to keep it all wrong. At that thought Turpin's jaw set. The rôle of the docile sheep might be difficult to keep up very long.

The next he knew the car had turned

in at a gate and was following a dark tree-lined avenue. In another minute it had stopped before the door of a house, and he was being lifted out by the chauffeur and the man from the front seat, and carried into a hall. But first a dark bandanna was tied over his eyes, and as he could do nothing with his arms or legs, he had to submit. He felt himself carried up a short staircase, and then along a corridor into a bedroom, where a lamp was lit.

A pleasant country bedroom, it seemed, with water colors on the walls. Hands undressed him—his eyes still bandaged—and equipped him with pyjamas which were not his own, and were at once too roomy and too short. Then food was brought, and an English voice observed that he had better have some supper before going to sleep. The bandage was taken off, and he saw two male backs disappearing through the door.

Up till now he had felt no hunger or thirst, but the sight of food made him realize that he was as empty as a drum. By twisting his head he could see it all laid out on the table beside his bed—a good meal it looked—cold ham and galantine, an omelette, a salad, cheese, and a small decanter of red wine. His soul longed for it, but what about his feeble limbs? Was this some new torture of Tantalus?

Desire grew, and like an automaton he moved to it. He felt all numbed, with needles and pins everywhere, but surely he was less feeble than he had been in the car.

First he managed to get his right arm extended, and by flexing the elbow and wrist a certain life seemed to creep back. Then he did the same thing with his right leg, and presently found that he could wriggle by inches to the edge of the bed. He was soon out of breath, but there could be no doubt about it, he was getting stronger. An access of thirst enabled him to grasp the decanter, and after some trouble with the stopper, to draw it to his lips. Spilling a good deal, he succeeded in getting a mouthful.

"Larose," he murmured, "and a good vintage. It would have been better if it had been cognac."

But the wine put new life into him. He found he could use both arms, and he began wolfishly on the omelette, making a rather messy job of it. By this time he was feeling a remarkably vigorous convalescent, and he continued with the cold meat till the cramp in his left shoulder forced him to lie back on the pillows. It soon passed, and he was able in fair comfort to finish the meal down to the last lettuce leaf of the salad, and the last drop of the claret. The Turpin who reclined again on the bed was to all intents the same vigorous young man who the night before had stumbled through that fateful door into the darkness. But it was a Turpin with a profoundly mystified mind.

He would have liked to smoke, but his cigarettes were in the pocket of his dress clothes which had been removed. So he started to do for his legs what he had already achieved for his arms, and with the same happy results. It occurred to him that while he was alone he had better discover whether or not he could stand. He made the effort, rolled out of bed on the floor, hit the little table with his head and set the dishes rattling.

But after a few scrambles he got on his feet and managed to shuffle round the room. The mischief was leaving his body—so much was plain, and but for a natural stiffness in the joints he felt as well as ever. But what it all meant he hadn't a notion. He was inclined to the belief that somehow he had scored off his enemies, and was a tougher proposition than they had bargained for. They had assuredly done no harm to his mind with their witchcraft, and it looked as if they had also failed with his body. The thought emboldened him. The house seemed quiet, why should he not do a little exploration?

He cautiously opened the door, finding it, somewhat to his surprise, unlocked. The passage was lit by a hanging oil lamp, carpeted with an old-fashioned drugget, and its walls decorated with a set of flower pictures. Turpin came to the conclusion that never in his life had he been in a dwelling which seemed more innocent and homelike. He considered himself sensitive to the *nuances* of the sinister in an atmosphere,

and there was nothing of that sort in this. He took a step or two down the passage, and then halted, for he thought he heard a sound. Yes, there could be no doubt of it. It was water gushing from a tap. Some one in the establishment was about to have a bath.

Then he slipped back to his room just in time. The some one was approaching with light feet and a rustle of draperies. He had his door shut when the steps passed, and then opened it and stuck his head out. He saw a pink dressing gown, and above it a slender neck and masses of dark hair. It was the figure which he of all men was likely to know best.

It seemed that the place for him was bed, so he got between the sheets again and tried to think. Adela Victor was here; therefore he was in the hands of her captors, and made a fourth in their bag. But what insanity had prompted these wary criminals to bring the two of them to the same prison? Were they so utterly secure, so confident of their power, that they took this crazy risk? The insolence of it made him furious. In the name of every saint he swore that he would make them regret it. He would free the lady and himself, though he had to burn down the house and wring the neck of every inmate. And then he remembered the delicacy of the business, and the need of exact timing if the other two hostages were not to be lost, and at the thought he groaned.

There was a tap at the door, and a man entered to clear away the supper table. He seemed an ordinary English valet, with his stiff collar and decent black coat and smug, expressionless face.

"Beg pardon, my lord," he said, "at what hour would you like your shavin' water? Seein' it's been a late night I make so bold as to suggest ten o'clock."

Turpin assented, and the servant had hardly gone when another visitor appeared. It was a slim, pale man, whom he was not conscious of having seen before, a man with gray hair and a melancholy droop of the head.

He stood erect at the foot of the bed, gazing upon the prostrate Turpin, and his look was friendly. Then he addressed him in French of the most Saxon type.

"Etes-vous confortable, monsieur? C'est bien. Soyez tranquille. Nous sommes vos amis. Bon soir."

CHAPTER XVI.

OUR TIME IS NARROWED.

I LUNCHEd that day with Mary—alone, for her aunts were both in Paris—and it would have been hard to find in the confines of the British islands a more dejected pair. Mary, who had always a singular placid gentleness, showed her discomposure only by her pallor. As for me I was as restless as a bantam.

"I wish I had never touched the thing," I cried. "I have done more harm than good."

"You have found Lord Mercot," she protested.

"Yes, and lost Turpin. The brutes are still three up on us. We thought we had found two, and now we have lost Miss Victor again. And Turpin! They'll find him an ugly customer, and probably take strong measures with him. They'll stick to him and the girl and the little boy now, like wax; for last night's performance is bound to make them suspicious."

"I wonder," said Mary, always an optimist. "You see, Sir Archie's only dragged him in because of his rank. It looked odd his being in Adela's company, but then all the times he has seen her he never spoke a word to her. They must have noticed that. I'm anxious about Sir Archie. He ought to leave London."

"Confound him! He's going to, as soon as he gets out of the hospital which will probably be this afternoon. I insisted on it, but he meant to in any case. He's heard an authentic report of a green sandpiper nesting somewhere. It would be a good thing if Archie would stick to birds. He has no head for anything else. And now we've got to start again at the beginning."

"Not quite the beginning," she interposed.

"Dashed near it. They won't bring Miss Victor into that kind of world again, and all your work goes for nothing, my dear. It's uncommon bad luck that you didn't

begin to wake her up, for then she might have done something on her own account. But she's still a dummy, and tucked away, you may be sure in, in some place where we can never reach her. And we have little more than three weeks left."

"It is bad luck," Mary agreed. "But Dick, I've a feeling that I haven't lost Adela Victor. I believe that somehow or other we'll soon get in touch with her again. You remember how children when they lose a ball sometimes send another one after it in the hope that one will find the other. Well, we've sent the marquis after Adela, and I've a notion we may find them both together. We always did that as children—"

She paused at the word 'children' and I saw pain in her eyes.

"Oh, Dick, the little boy! We're no nearer him and he's far the most tragic of all."

The whole business looked so black that I had no word of comfort to give her.

"And to put the lid on it," I groaned, "I've got to settle down in Medina's house this evening. I hate the idea like poison."

"It's the safest way," she said.

"Yes, but it puts me out of action. He'll watch me like a lynx and I won't be able to take a single step on my own—simply sit there and eat and drink and play up to his vanity. Great Scott, I swear I'll have a row with him and break his head."

"Oh, Dick, you're not going to—how do you say it—chuck in your hand? Everything depends on you. You're our scout in the enemy's headquarters. Your life depends on your playing the game. Colonel Arbuthnot said so. And you may find out something tremendous. It will be horrible for you, and it isn't for long, and it's the only way."

That was Mary all over. She was trembling with anxiety for me, but she was such a thorough sportsman that she wouldn't take any soft option.

"You may hear something about David Warcliff," she added.

"I hope to God I do. Don't worry, darling. I'll stick it out. But, look here, we must make a plan. I shall be more or less shut off from the world, but I must have

a line of communication open. You can't telephone to me at that house, and I daren't ring you up from there. The only chance is the club. If you have any message, ring up the head porter and make him write it down. I'll arrange that he keeps it quiet, and I'll pick up the messages when I get the chance. And I'll ring you up occasionally to give you the news. But I must be jolly careful, for, likely as not, Medina will keep an eye on me even there. You're in touch with Macgillivray?"

She nodded.

"And with Sandy?"

"Yes, but it takes some time—a day at least. We can't correspond direct.

"Well, there's the lay-out. I'm a prisoner—with hopes. You and I can keep up some sort of communication. As you say, there's only about another three weeks."

"It would be nothing if only we had some hope."

"That's life, my dear. We've got to go on to the finish anyhow, trusting that luck will turn in the last ten minutes."

I arrived in Hill Street after tea and found Medina in the back smoking room, writing letters.

"Good man, Hannay," he said, "make yourself comfortable. There are cigars on that table."

"Had a satisfactory time in Shropshire?" I asked.

"Rotten. I motored back this morning, starting very early. Some tiresome business here wanted my attention. I'm sorry, but I'll be out to dinner to-night. The same thing always happens when I want to see my friends—a hideous rush of work."

He was very hospitable, but his manner had not the ease it used to have. He seemed on the edge about something, and rather preoccupied. I guessed it was the affair of Archie Roylance and Turpin.

I dined alone and sat after dinner in the smoking room, for Odell never suggested the library, though I would have given a lot to fossick about that place. I fell asleep over the *Field* and was awakened about eleven by Medina. He looked almost tired, a rare thing for him; also his voice was curiously hard. He made some trivial remark about the weather, and a row in the

Cabinet which was going on. Then he said suddenly:

"Have you seen Arbuthnot lately?"

"No," I replied, with real surprise in my tone. "How could I? He has gone back to the East."

"So I thought. But I have been told that he has been seen again in England."

For a second I had a horrid fear that he had got on the track of my meeting with Sandy at the Cotswold Inn and his visit to Fosse. His next words reassured me:

"Yes. In London. Within the last few days."

It was easy enough for me to show astonishment. "What a crazy fellow he is! He can't stay out for a week together. All I can say is that I hope he won't come my way. I've no particular wish to see him again."

Medina said no more. He accompanied me to my bedroom, asked if I had everything I wanted, bade me good night, and left me.

Now began one of the queerest weeks in my life. Looking back it has still the inconsequence of a nightmare, but one or two episodes stand out like reefs in a tide-race. When I woke the first morning under Medina's roof, I believed that somehow or other he had come to suspect me.

I soon saw that that was nonsense, that he regarded me as a pure chattel; but I saw, too, that a most active suspicion of something had been awakened in his mind. Probably Archie's fiasco, together with the news of Sandy, had done it, and perhaps there was in it something of the natural anxiety of a man nearing the end of a difficult course. Anyhow, I concluded that this tension of mind on his part was bound to make things more difficult for me. Without suspecting me, he kept me perpetually under his eye. He gave me orders as if I were a child, or rather, he made suggestions, which in my character of worshipping disciple I had to treat as orders.

He was furiously busy night and day, and yet he left me no time to myself. He wanted to know everything I did, and I had to give an honest account of my doings, for I had a feeling that he had ways of finding out the truth. One lie discovered,

would, I knew, wreck my business utterly, for if I were under his power, as he believed I was, it would be impossible for me to lie to him. Consequently I dared not pay many visits to the club, for he would want to know what I did there. I was on such desperately thin ice that I thought it best to stay most of my time in Hill Street, unless he asked me to accompany him. I consulted Mary about this, and she agreed that it was the wise course. Apart from a flock of maids, there was no other man in the house but Odell. Twice I met the gray, sad-faced man on the stairs—the man I had seen on my first visit, and had watched a week before in the house behind the curiosity shop. I asked who he was, and was told a private secretary, who helped Medina in his political work. I gathered that he did not live regularly in the house, but only came there when his services were required.

Now Mary had said that the other man that evening in Little Fardell Street had been Sandy. If she was right, this fellow might be a friend, and I wondered if I could get in touch with him. The first time I encountered him he never raised his eyes. The second time I forced him by some question to look at me, and he turned on me a perfectly dead, expressionless face like a codfish. I concluded that Mary had been in error, for this was the genuine satallite, every feature of whose character had been steam-rollered out of existence by Medina's will.

I was seeing Medina now at very close quarters, and in complete undress, and the impression he had made on me at our first meeting—which had been all overlaid by subsequent happenings—grew as vivid again as daylight. The "good fellow," of course, had gone; I saw behind all his perfection of manner to the naked ribs of his soul.

He would talk to me late at night in that awful library, till I felt that he and the room were one presence, and that all the diabolic lore of the ages had been absorbed by this one mortal. You must understand that there was nothing wrong in the ordinary sense with anything he said. If there had been a phonograph recording his talk

it could have been turned on with perfect safety in a girl's school. He never spoke foully, or brutally. I don't believe he had a shadow of those faults of the flesh which we mean when we use the word "vice." But I swear that the most wretched libertine before the bar of the Almighty would have shown a clean sheet compared to his.

I know no word to describe how he impressed me except "wickedness." He seemed to annihilate the world of ordinary moral standards, all the little rags of honest impulse and stumbling kindness with which we try to shelter ourselves from the winds of space. His consuming egotism made life a bare cosmos in which his spirit scorched like a flame. I have met bad men in my day—fellows who ought to have been quietly and summarily put out of existence, but if I had had the trying of them I would have found bits of submerged decency and stunted remnants of good feeling. At any rate they were human, and their beastliness was a degeneration of humanity, not its flat opposite.

Medina made an atmosphere which was like a cold bright air in which nothing can live. He was utterly and consumedly wicked, with no standard which could be remotely related to ordinary life. That is why, I suppose, mankind has had to invent the notion of devils. He seemed to be always lifting the corner of a curtain and giving me peeps into a heavy mystery of iniquity older than the stars. I suppose that some one who had never felt his hypnotic power would have noticed very little in his talk except its audacious cleverness, and that some one wholly under his dominion would have been less impressed than me because he would have forgotten his own standards, and been unable to make the comparison. I was just in the right position to understand and tremble. Oh, I can tell you, I used to go to bed solemnized, frightened half out of my wits, and yet in violent repulsion, and hating him like hell. I was pretty clear that he was mad, for madness means just this dislocation of the modes of thought which mortals have agreed upon as necessary to keep the world together. His head used to seem as round as a bullet, like nothing you find even in

the skulls of cavemen, and his eyes to have a blue light in them like the sunrise of death in an arctic waste.

One day I had a very narrow escape. I went to the club to see if there was anything from Mary, and found instead a long cable from Gaudian in Norway. I had just opened it when I found Medina at my elbow. He had seen me enter, and followed me, in order that we should walk home together.

Now I had arranged a simple code with Gaudian for his cables, and by the mercy of Heaven that honest fellow had taken special precautions and got some friend to send this message from Christiania. Had it borne the Merdal stamp it would have been all up with me.

The only course was the bold one, though I pursued it with a quaking heart.

"Hello!" I cried. "Here's a cable from a pal of mine in Norway. Did I tell you I had been trying to get a beat on the Leardal for July? I had almost forgotten about the thing. I started inquiring in March, and here's my first news."

I handed him the two sheets, and he glanced at the place of dispatch.

"Code," he said. "Do you want to work it out now?"

"If you don't mind waiting a few seconds. It's a simple code of my own invention, and I ought to be able to decipher it pretty fast."

We sat down at one of the tables in the hall, and I took up a pen and a sheet of note paper.

As I think I have mentioned before, I am rather a swell at codes, and this one in particular I could read without much difficulty. I jotted down some letters and numbers, and then wrote out a version, which I handed to Medina. This was what he read:

Upper beat Leardal available from first of month. Rent two hundred and fifty with option of August at one hundred more. No limit to rods. Boat on each pool. Tidal waters can also be got for sea trout, by arrangement. If you accept please cable word "Yes." You should arrive not later than June 29. Bring plenty of bottled prawns. Motor boat can be had from Bergen. Andersen, Grand Hotel, Christiania.

7 A

But all the time I was scribbling this nonsense I was reading the code correctly and getting the message by heart. Here is what Gaudian really sent:

Our friend has quarreled with keeper and beaten him soundly. I have taken charge at farm and frightened latter into docility. He will remain prisoner in charge of ally of mine till I give the word to release. Meantime think it safer to bring friend to England and start on Monday. Will wire address in Scotland and wait your instructions. No danger of keeper sending message. Do not be anxious, all is well.

Having got that clear in my head, I tore the cable into small pieces and flung them into the waste-paper basket.

"Well, are you going?" Medina asked.

"Not I. I'm off salmon fishing for the present." I took a cable form from the table and wrote: "Sorry, must cancel Leardal plan," signed it "Hannay," addressed it to "Andersen, Grand Hotel, Christiania," and gave it to the porter to send off. I wonder what happened to that telegram. It is probably still stuck up on the hotel board, awaiting the arrival of the mythical Andersen.

On our way back to Hill Street Medina put his arm in mine and was very friendly.

"I hope to get a holiday," he said. "Perhaps just after the beginning of June. Only a day or two now. I may go abroad for a little. I would like you to come with me."

That puzzled me a lot. Medina could not possibly leave town before the great liquidation, and there could be no motive in his trying to mislead me on such a point, seeing that I was living in his house. I wondered if something had happened to make him change the date. It was of the first importance that I should find this out, and I did my best to draw him out about his plans. I could get nothing out of him except that he hoped for an early holiday, and "early" might apply to the middle of June as well as to the beginning, for it was now the 27th day of May.

Next afternoon at tea time, to my surprise, Odell appeared in the smoking room, followed by the long lean figure of Tom Greenslade. I never saw anybody with

greater pleasure, but I didn't dare to talk to him alone.

"Is your master upstairs?" I asked the butler. "Will you tell him that Dr. Greenslade is here? He is an old friend of his."

We had rather less than two minutes before Medina appeared.

"I come from your wife," Greenslade whispered. "She has told me all about the business, and she thought this was the safest plan. I was to tell you that she has news of Miss Victor and the marquis. They are safe enough. Any word of the little boy?"

He raised his voice as Medina entered. "My dear fellow, this is a great pleasure. I had to be in London for a consultation, and I thought I would look up Hannay. I hardly hoped to have the luck to catch a busy man like you."

Medina was very gracious—no, that is not the word, for there was nothing patronizing in his manner. He asked in the most friendly way about Greenslade's practice, and how he liked English country life after his many wanderings. He spoke with an air of regret of the great valleys and the windy Central Asian tablelands where they had first forgathered. Odell brought in tea, and we made as pleasant a trio of friends as you could find in London.

I asked a few casual questions about Fosse, and then I mentioned Peter John. Here Greenslade had an inspiration; he told me afterward that he thought it might be a good thing to open a channel for further communications.

"I think he's all right," he said slowly. "He's been having occasional stomach-aches, but I expect that is only the result of hot weather and the first asparagus. Lady Hannay is a little anxious—you know what she is, and all mothers to-day keep thinking about appendicitis. So I'm keeping my eye on the little man. You needn't worry, Dick."

I take credit to myself for having divined the doctor's intention. I behaved as if I scarcely heard him, and as if Fosse Manor and my family were things infinitely remote. Indeed, I switched off the conversation to where Medina had last left it, and behaved toward Tom Greenslade as if his

presence rather bored me, and I had very little to say to him. When he got up to go, it was Medina who accompanied him to the front door. All this was a heavy strain upon my self-command, for I would have given anything for a long talk with him—though I had the sense not to believe his news about Peter John.

"Not a bad fellow, that doctor of yours," Medina observed on his return.

"No," I said carelessly. "Rather a dull dog all the same, with his country gossip. But I wish him well, for it is to him that I owe your friendship."

I must count that episode one of my lucky moments, for it seemed to give Medina some special satisfaction.

"Why do you make this your only sitting room?" he asked. "The library is at your disposal, and it is pleasanter in summer than any other part of the house."

"I thought I might be disturbing your work," I said humbly.

"Not a bit of it. Besides, I've nearly finished my work. After to-night I can slack off, and presently I'll be an idle man."

"And then the holiday?"

"Then the holiday." He smiled in a pleasant boyish way, which was one of his prettiest tricks.

"How soon will that be?"

"If all goes well, very soon. Probably after the second of June. By the way, the Thursday Club dines on the first. I want you to be my guest again."

Here was more food for thought. The conviction grew upon me that he and his friends had put forward the date of liquidation; they must have suspected something—probably from Sandy's presence in England—and were taking no risks. I smoked that evening till my tongue was sore and went to bed in a fever of excitement.

The urgency of the matter fairly screamed in my ears, for Macgillivray must know the truth at once and so must Mary. Mercot was safe, and there was a chance apparently of Turpin and Miss Victor, which must be acted upon instantly if the main date were changed. Of the little boy I had given up all hope. But how to find the truth! I felt like a man in a bad dream

who is standing on the line with an express train approaching, and does not know exactly how to climb back on to the platform.

Next morning Medina never left me. He took me in his car to the city, and I waited while he did his business, and then to call in Carlton House Terrace a few doors from the Victors' house. I believe it was the residence of the man who led his party in the Lords. After luncheon, he solemnly inducted me in the library.

"You're not much of a reader, and in any case you would probably find my books dull. But there are excellent armchairs to doze in."

Then he went out and I heard the wheels of his car move away. I felt a kind of awe creeping over me when I found myself left alone in that uncanny place, which I knew to be the devil's kitchen for all his schemes.

There was a telephone on his writing table, and it was the only one I had seen in the house, though there was no doubt one in the butler's pantry. I turned up the telephone book and found a number given, but it was not the one on the receiver. It must be a private telephone, by means of which he could ring up anybody he wanted, but of which only his special friends knew the number.

There was nothing else in the room to interest me, except the lines and lines of books, for his table was just as bare as a bank manager's.

I tried the books, but most of them were a long sight too learned for me. Most were old, and many were in Latin, and some were evidently treasures, for I would take one down and find it a leather box with inside a slim battered volume wrapped in wash leather.

But I found in one corner a great array of works of travel, so I selected one of Aurel Stein's books and settled down in an armchair with it.

I tried to fix my attention, but found it impossible. The sentences would not make sense to my restless mind, and I could not follow the maps. So I got up again, replaced the work on its shelf, and began to wander about. It was a dull, close day, and

out in the street a water-cart was sprinkling the dust and children were going parkward with their nurses. I simply could not account for my disquiet, but I was like a fine lady in the vapors. I felt certain that somewhere in that room there was something; and that it concerned me deeply to know.

I drifted toward the bare writing table. There was nothing on it but a massive silver inkstand in the shape of an owl, a silver tray of pens and oddments, a leather case of note-paper and a big blotting-book. I would never have made a good thief, for I felt both nervous and ashamed as, after listening for steps, I decided to try the drawers.

They were all locked—all that is, except a shallow one at the top which looked as if it were meant to contain one of those big engagement tablets which busy men affect. There was no tablet there, but there were two sheets of paper.

Both had been torn from a loose-leaf diary, and both covered the same dates—the fortnight between Monday, the 29th of May, and Sunday, the 11th of June. In the first the space for the days was filled with entries in Medina's neat writing, entries in some sort of shorthand. These entries were close and thick up to and including Friday the 2nd of June; but after that there was nothing.

The second sheet of paper was just the opposite. The spaces were virgin up to and including the 2nd of June; after that, on till the 11th, they were filled with notes.

As I stared at these two sheets, some happy instinct made me divine their meaning.

The first sheet contained the steps that Medina would take up to the day of liquidation, which was clearly the 2nd of June. After that, if all went well, came peace and leisure. But if it didn't go well, the second sheet contained his plans—plans I have no doubt for using the hostages, for wringing safety out of certain great men's fears. My interpretation was confirmed by a small jotting in long hand on the first sheet in the space for 2nd June. It was the two words "*Dies irae*," which my Latin was just good enough to construe.

I had lost all my tremors now, but I was a thousandfold more restless. I must get word to Macgillivray at once—no, that was too dangerous—to Mary. I glanced at the telephone and resolved to trust to my luck.

I got through to the Wymondhams' house without difficulty. Barnard the butler answered, and informed me that Mary was at home. Then, after a few seconds I heard her voice.

"Mary," I said, "the day is changed to the second of June. You understand, warn everybody. I can't think why you are worrying about that child," I went on.

For I was conscious that Medina had entered the room. I managed with my knee to close the shallow drawer with the two sheets in it, and I nodded and smiled to him, putting my hand over the receiver.

"Forgive me using your telephone. Fact is, my wife's in London and she sent me round a note here asking me to ring her up. She's got the boy on her mind."

I put the tube to my ear again. Mary's voice sounded sharp and high-pitched.

"Are you there? I'm in Mr. Medina's library and I can't disturb him talking through this machine. There's no cause to worry about Peter John. Greenslade is fussy enough, and if he's calm, there's no reason why you shouldn't be. But if you want another opinion, why not get it? We may as well get the thing straightened out now, for I may be going abroad early in June. Yes, sometime after the second."

Thank God, Mary was quick-witted.

"The second is very near. Why do you make such sudden plans, Dick? I can't go home without seeing you. I think I'll come straight to Hill Street."

"All right," I said, "do as you please." I rang off and looked at Medina with a wry smile. "What fussers women are! Do you mind if my wife comes round here? She won't be content till she has seen me. She has come up with a crazy notion of taking down a surgeon to give an opinion on the child's appendix. Tommyrot! But that's a woman's way."

He clearly suspected nothing. "Certainly let Lady Hannay come here. We'll give her tea. I'm sorry that the drawing-

room is out of commission just now. She might have liked to see my miniatures."

Mary appeared in ten minutes, and most nobly she acted her part. It was the very model of a distraught silly mother who bustled into the room. Her eyes looked as if she had been crying and she managed to disarrange her hat and untidy her hair.

"Oh, I've been so worried," she wailed, after she had murmured apologies to Medina. "He really has had a bad tummy pain, and nurse thought last night that he was feverish. I've seen Mr. Dobson-Wray. He's coming down by the four forty-five. He's such a precious little boy, Mr. Medina, that I feel we must take every precaution with him. If Mr. Dobson-Wray says it is all right, I promise not to fuss any more. I think a second opinion would please Dr. Greenslade, for he too looked rather anxious. Oh, no, thank you so much, but I can't stop for tea. I have a taxi waiting, and I might miss my train. I'm going to pick up Mr. Dobson-Wray in Wimpole Street."

She departed in the same tornado in which she had come, just stopping to set her hat straight at one of the mirrors in the hall.

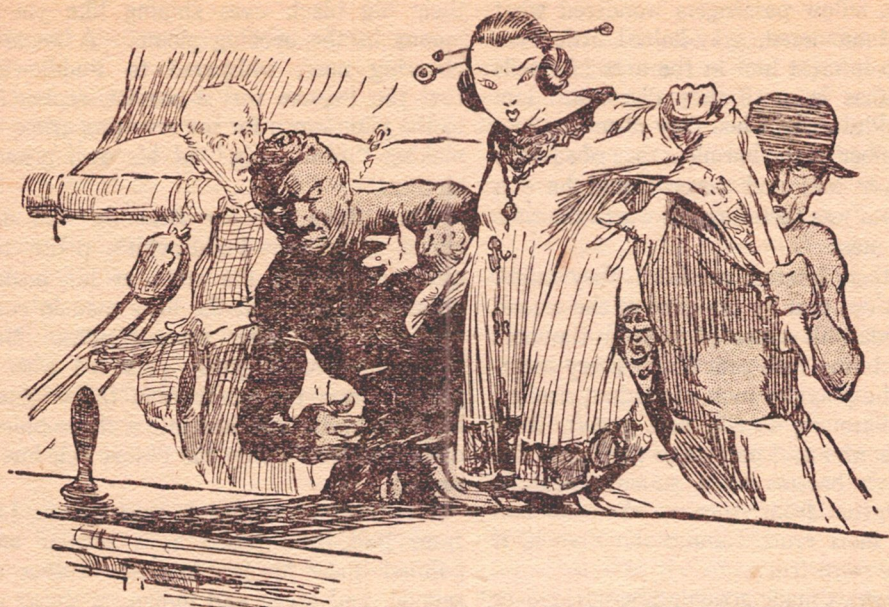
"Of course, I'll wire when the surgeon has seen him. And, Dick, you'll come down at once if there's anything wrong, and bring nurses. Poor, poor little darling! Did you say after the second of June, Dick? I do hope you'll be able to get off. You need a holiday away from your tiresome family. Good-by, Mr. Medina. It was so kind of you to be patient with a silly mother. Look after Dick and don't let him worry."

I had preserved admirably the aloof air of the bored and slightly ashamed husband. But now I realized that Mary was not babbling at large but was saying something which I was meant to take in.

"Poor, poor little darling!" she crooned as she got into a taxi. "I do pray he'll be all right—I *think* he may, Dick—I hope, oh I hope—to put your mind at ease—before the second of June."

As I turned back to Medina I had a notion that the poor little darling was no longer Peter John.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



The Lady from Macassar

By JOHN CHARLES BEECHAM

When hate answers hate, where shall hate end?—*Buddha.*

The nation which indulges toward another an habitual hatred . . . is in some degree a slave.—*George Washington.*

THE passenger list of the coast packet *Batavier*, *en route* from Batavia, Java, to North Sumatran ports, was a mixed one. That was inevitable in a corner of the world where men of every degree of shade and color rub elbows in pursuit of the elusive dollar. On the upper deck basked the whites, with Mongolians of wealth, and Arabs and Hindus of approved lineage; below, the mongrel tribes and races of Asia and Malaysia herded. They crammed the lower deck from bow to stern, a polyglot assortment of smelly humanity, eating, sleeping, dicing and reeking in the coffin length of deck per individual which each had preëmpted on coming aboard.

It is a six-day run from Batavia to Pidië

on the *Batavier*. Swift liners make the voyage in three days, and tramp freighters in from four to five days; but the *Batavier*, quaint, superannuated relic of the days when sail turned up its nose at steam, wheezed listlessly along the margin of sun-baked flats at a scant eight miles an hour. Her engineer was a genius, otherwise he would never have coaxed the service out of her worn-out boilers and machinery that he did. Each voyage would be the last, master and chief of the fire room lugubriously assured each other whenever they left port, but none of this leaked out to the passengers, whatever they may have suspected.

Since the departure from Batavia, A. Puddlewhit had spent much of his time between decks. It was his custom to vanish below immediately after breakfast, not to reappear until the silvery tinkle of a Chinese gong proclaimed the rice hour. On a small ship such things are noticed. Pud-

dulewhit's fellow passengers wondered what the mild-mannered, gray-haired little man found to interest him in the area of smells below—that is, until they discovered him reading Plutarch. Then they dismissed him as a member of the harmless race of savants who never had and never would have a dollar, and was therefore not worth the time of busy men.

Had their interest persisted, they might have noticed that by the close of the second day Puddlewhit appeared to be on the most friendly terms with practically every member of the polyglot mob of traders, coolies, snake charmers, *hadjis*, and *gogols*, from the Turk who sold parrots to the fair ladies of Cairo's harems to a sullen Singalese, fresh drafted from Annam, where he had suffered most cruelly under the French, if his story were true.

Puddlewhit made acquaintances wherever he went. It was for this reason that he knew so many people of high and low degree throughout Insulinde—more, the governor general declared, than any other of his forty million subjects. This was one of the reasons why he was so highly esteemed at Batavia's capital as a trusted secret agent. Yet he had no mercenary object in making friends. Puddlewhit talked and laughed and sympathized with people because he loved them, particularly the humble.

Many things A. Puddlewhit observed and heard during his sojournings between decks. For instance, there was the stout Kling, mellow in manner and mild of eye, who dealt in djeloetong and aromatic gums. He talked of nothing save his love for the white man and the beneficence of the Dutch colonial government. Yet rumor said he had killed a man, back in India, and there was a short shrift and a long rope ready for him if ever the Calcutta government got hold of him. For this reason he never entered a British port or sailed under a British flag.

There was a pygmy Papuan *en route* to one of the north ports, where he was to strip tobacco. He played weird and reedy tunes on a *kaludi* for the entertainment of a preternaturally solemn brood of Javanese youngsters that sat circlewise around him,

their big black eyes shining like young moons in the evening gloom. A *mandil*, hovering near, whispered to Puddlewhit that the Papuan was a convict, sentenced to the plantations for the revolting crime of making "brown pig" of his own grandmother.

Then there was the Brahmin who declined to answer Puddlewhit's polite inquiry concerning the state of his health because he had seen the little man in conversation with lesser caste Hindus. But when Puddlewhit gently persisted with a passage from the *Vindhya* in the original, they forthwith launched into a theosophical discussion which only the dinner bell interrupted.

Nor must we neglect to mention the Jap from Bali, who posed as a scholar and painted queer ideographs with brushes of salmon, and green and indigo on sheets of rice paper.

"Beware of him," warned the *mandil*. "He is a gamester, and will have every loose dollar aboard before the voyage is done."

"Don't you object to his dicing with your coolies?" Puddlewhit asked.

The *mandil* shrugged his shoulders and grinned evilly.

"The poorer they are, the more they will borrow, and the longer they will be in my debt," he returned.

Whereupon the versatile Puddlewhit, reflecting that such a man needed a lesson, enticed the *mandil* into an adventure with cards and fleeced him to his last copper penny.

Finally there was the Lady from Macassar. Puddlewhit called her the Lady from Macassar, because that was all the information he was able to glean about her from the others on board. She was Chinese and undoubtedly of noble blood. There are certain evidences of taste and refinement that distinguish the lady in every land, in whatever circumstances she may be. The discerning eye of A. Puddlewhit found them in her. She had evidently fallen upon evil days, he perceived; her very presence on the lower deck revealed her poverty. There was a child with her—an impish lad of seven or eight, a bit out of hand at

times and uneducated to Mongolian repressions.

Their acquaintanceship began on the morning of the second day, when the boy, romping about, ran full tilt into Puddlewhit and sat violently back on the deck as a consequence. Looking down, the rattan merchant saw a pair of almond eyes looking affrightedly up into his. The boy apparently feared a blow or a kick, for he flung a frail arm upward to protect his face. In the same moment the mother's voice sounded on A. Puddlewhit's ears in a low-voiced plea, the voice of one who has learned the cruelty of a harsh world and expects naught else.

"Forgive, *mynheer*," she implored in tones liquid soft and musical as the play of water in a fountain. "He did not see—"

Puddlewhit lifted the lad and brushed his blouse. The slant eyes watched him furtively and fearfully, ready to dodge a blow. Puddlewhit smiled benignly. His was a face men and children both instinctively trusted. The boy brightened. Puddlewhit's right hand burrowed into his trousers pocket and emerged with a bright new penny that was transferred after a moment of childish hesitancy into the lad's grimy paw. The compact between man and boy was sealed.

The mother, witnessing the transaction, swiftly turned to hide her face. Women of the Orient, good women, shrink from promiscuous acquaintanceship.

Puddlewhit respected her modesty. He walked away.

He was conscious that morning as he moved from group to group, finding new acquaintances and greeting old ones, that her eyes followed him. Presently in the course of his peregrinations he wandered back to the portion of the deck where she had domiciled herself among the other women. A tug at his coattails caused him to turn. There was the boy, her son, murmuring his belated thanks for the penny in the *lingua franca* of the archipelago.

Puddlewhit gravely acknowledged the lad's formal little speech. His eyes met the mother's. This time hers did not fall. Instead, she smiled a shy welcome. He joined her. They talked generalities—

about the heat, the length of the voyage, and the frequency of the monsoon. The conversation lasted only a few minutes—three, possibly, not more than four. Yet in that short time each had yielded to the other a surprising amount of knowledge.

Puddlewhit knew for instance, that she was a widow, fallen upon misfortune in far-off Celebes, and *en route* with her child to a relative at Keumala. It was the second time death had robbed her of a mate and protector. She had classified him, in spite of his unprepossessing appearance, among the white men who are angels. She had only two classifications for the race without pigment—they were either angels or devils, and sad experience had taught her the latter far predominated.

She was fair, remarkably fair for one of her people, with delicately chiseled features. It was impossible to guess her age, art so perfectly supplemented nature, after the fashion of the Chinese, in the care of her complexion. Puddlewhit guessed from her story that she had passed her first youth, yet he intuitively felt that she was one of those rare women whom serenity keeps forever from growing old. Short-statured and dainty, with little hands that showed no traces of toil, she complemented these physical perfections with a modesty and reserve and breeding that completed her charm and left nothing to be desired.

She had need of all her womanly defenses of modesty and reserve and the protecting arms of childhood to slant away the covetous glances of the polyglot crew that swarmed about her, Puddlewhit perceived. He cast a level glance about the deck, meeting the eyes of those covertly leering until they turned away. She never knew what a protection Puddlewhit's truculent frown was and from what annoyance it saved her.

After the rice hour that afternoon Puddlewhit curled up in a steamer chair beside Teema Doud, the coolie whom he had made King of the Battahs, the rebellious hillmen of Sumatra.

"Teema," he remarked, "you have not been between decks."

Teema Doud glanced at his immaculate white flannels, sharply creased, his silken socks, and his tennis shoes. His chin ele-

vated a trifle. He was a white man, the gods be praised. A. Puddlewhit himself had said it.

"I am a king, the son of a king," he returned with hauteur.

"That is true," Puddlewhit agreed amiably. "But has not a wise one said that humility is the measure of a king?"

"That is Christman talk," Teema returned impatiently.

"And the teaching of the Bhagavat," Puddlewhit corrected. "What is the Creed? 'Better than sacrifice is liberality, better than liberality is faith, better than faith is kindness.'"

Teema stared sullenly seaward without replying. Puddlewhit's eyes narrowed. He gazed somberly at the green, mangrove-lined coast that slowly unwound itself a mile of blue water distant.

"He is a half-blood," he murmured to himself. "He will be hard to control."

"Teema," he asked in sudden inspiration, "tell me about your mother."

The young man drew back sharply, his keen, black eyes sharply questioning. Sullen suspicion was in them, and a kindling of angry passion.

"Why?" he demanded harshly.

"Because I want to see her through your eyes," A. Puddlewhit returned gently. "Then, perhaps, I shall understand you better."

Teema looked away. Lines of pain gathered in his face. He was powerfully emotional—it was the Celtic strain in him, perhaps. Presently he took an object from a little pouch hanging next to his breast and held it in the palm of his hand. It was a battered silver crucifix.

"That is all I have of her," he said brokenly. "And of my father, too. The Christman gave it to them the day they were wed. Many times men have taken it from me, when I was a child, sailing from place to place on ships under every flag, but I told them it was a charm that brought evil to all who bore it. So they let me have it again, with curses. When I look at it I see my mother, as she stood under the palms the day I fled—" His voice broke.

"Describe her to me, Teema," Puddlewhit said softly.

The young man brushed the offending moisture from his eyes.

"She was a lotus blossom," he returned with passionate fervor—"the fairest bloom of a mandarin's garden, fragrant as a hedgerow of tea vine in flower, beautiful as a moonstone. But my white blood called me, and I went. I was only a child then. It was best, for I was a burden to her. Thou dost not understand—"

He turned away to hide a tear. A. Puddlewhit's face puckered in a puzzled frown.

"What is it, Teema, that I do not understand?" he asked.

"Let me be a white man henceforth," Teema replied harshly. "Speak no more of my yellow blood or her who gave it me."

He rose abruptly and hurried away.

The next morning A. Puddlewhit saw the lady from Macassar again. She welcomed him warmly, almost cordially. As they conversed, her reserve gradually melted under the sun of his genial good humor, and she became less reticent. She told him of her late husband's brother, keeper of a *toko* shop in Keumala, who would give her asylum, she hoped. Concerning her own family she said nothing. Puddlewhit guessed an unfortunate girlhood marriage and disinheritance. Such things happen in China as well as in America, he reflected.

While they talked the boy spun a top. The mother's watchful regard gradually lessened. Perceiving his opportunity, the youngster edged away, gravitating through the crowd to the rail. Unmolested, he clambered up to get a nearer view of the fascinating roll of the sea.

It might have been a lurch of the ship, or again it might have been his mother's frightened cry as she perceived his peril that caused him to lose his equilibrium. Arms outstretched, he plunged face down into the smooth, green rollers, his scream of dismay strangled by the waters. The mother ran to the rail. Puddlewhit perceived her intent to throw herself after the child, and sped after her, catching her as she was about to swing over. She struggled fiercely clawing his face like a cat, mother love rendering her for the moment insane with frenzy.

A white flash from the upper deck shot

by and cut the water. They were crowding the rail now, the polyglot swarm between decks, and staring curiously at a streak of white that clove the seas toward the frantically struggling child. But none followed. The Malaysian is a supreme fatalist. There was a ringing of bells below, the ship's screw churned the brine in reverse. A boat was lowered.

Puddlewhit did not look at the swimmer. His eyes leaped from wave to wave in sickening anticipation. Suddenly they became riveted on a black triangle that appeared for a moment and vanished again, then reappeared, much nearer. The shark, dread scourge of tropic seas, was heading for its prey.

"Hurry!" he gasped hoarsely to those in the boat.

The mother guessed. With a shriek even more heartrending than the first, she threw Puddlewhit aside with a superhuman effort and sprang like a cat on the rail. But there were others now to intervene. Personally they were probably not interested whether the woman drowned herself, but since Puddlewhit desired to prevent it, they were eager to please him. They pulled her down despite her struggles and held her.

"It's Teema," Puddlewhit gasped, catching sight of the swimmer's face as he came up at length with the boy in his arms.

The shark was only a couple of boat-lengths away. The boat was more than thrice that distance. Teema saw his peril or guessed it from the roar that rose from the ship, a cry of warning voiced in a score of tongues and dialects. He promptly dived. The shark followed. A moment later Teema's head reappeared, with the shark close to him.

"Let go the calf and save thyself," a burly Kling standing next to Puddlewhit shouted.

The little man struck him in the face. Mercifully the mother did not hear. She stood rigid as a statue in the grip of those who held her, suffering the agony of a thousand deaths as she watched the dreadful game of hide and seek.

Teema dived again with the child. The black fin vanished. Then the breathless observers on the vessel saw Teema and the

child rise just beyond the shark's snout. It had missed again. Meanwhile the boat had gained a length.

Again the dreadful game of tag was repeated. Once more Teema and the child escaped, and the frantic mother exhaled a shuddering gasp.

But Teema was tiring. He had barely avoided the shark in the last rush, and the boat was still too far distant to be of help. He cast a despairing glance toward it, then, releasing the child, dived directly at the great fish, whirling on the surface. But the sacrifice was not required. One of the sailors in the approaching boat was an old whaler, and amused himself at times spearing sharks. He had his weapon, an old harpoon, with him, and as the shark turned, showing his belly, drove it deep into the brute's vitals.

The shark plunged, carrying harpoon and line with it. Teema, with quick presence of mind, dived for the child. Willing hands hauled them aboard, while the sailor pulled in his line as the great fish returned to the surface, belly up. Other sharks were gathering. The boat returned to the ship, leaving the jackals of the sea to their feast.

Teema and the child were hoisted to the deck. Teema appeared on the verge of exhaustion. The boy was spewing water. Ocean bred, the misadventure had meant no more than a ducking to him. His liveliest emotion was a fear of punishment.

The mother snatched the boy hungrily from Teema's arms and pressed him to her bosom. Teema turned swiftly to glide away, but Puddlewhit, divining his intent, caught his arm and restrained him.

"Wait!" he said. "She will want to thank you."

The mother's eyes lifted and met those of her son's rescuer. But the words of thanks that rose to her lips were left unuttered. The glow of gratefulness that suffused her cheeks vanished swiftly as she scanned his features and observed the tell-tale pale yellow of his skin, the pronounced cheek bones, the slant eyes.

"*Peranakan tjina!*" she gasped shudderingly, like one who has come upon a leper. Catching the child to her breast, she turned swiftly and vanished in the crowd.

A hoarse guffaw of laughter arose. "*Peranakan tjina*," several echoed in scornful disdain.

Teema flashed crimson. His chin shot up, his eyes swept the crowd with a glance of vindictive hate and scorn as great as their own. Charging through the crowd like a young bull on a stampede, he fled to the upper deck.

The incident lasted but a moment, and Puddlewhit was too stunned by the widow's amazing ingratitude and the extraordinary behavior of her fellow passengers to utter a protest. But as Teema Doud fled to the deck he turned in white hot fury on those who were shouting gibes and "*peranakan tjina*," in his wake.

"You dogs!" he roared. "Is that your thanks to a man who risked his life where none of you dared follow?"

Nature had dealt unkindly with Puddlewhit, his appearance was the opposite of imposing. Naturally gentle and of a calm and placid disposition, he was not easily moved to give way to passion, and rigid schooling had cultivated the habit of self-control. But as the deepest waters are susceptible of the most violent agitation when once sufficient force has been applied, so Puddlewhit now acquired a majesty of wrath which made the most fearless around him quail. As Balzac has said: "There is nothing so terrible as the rebellion of a sheep." They shrank back, muttering, not daring to meet his flaming eyes or lift voice against the scourge of his tongue.

When the heat of his anger died down, Puddlewhit walked slowly toward the woman's portion of the deck, where the lady from Macassar had taken refuge with her son. Reproach and sadness replaced the passion in his face. She watched him coming, her eyes meeting his unafraid.

"It was ungenerous of you," he reproached in a low voice. "Why did you do it?"

Her nose tilted disdainfully. "He is a mixed blood, half white, half yellow, a *peranakan tjina*," she said. It was as though she had called him a leper.

A light of understanding broke on Puddlewhit. He knew how highly the Chinese, particularly of high degree, value the purity

of their blood, and the loathing they have for the mongrel. In a flash he recalled Teema's bitter cry the day before, as they were discussing his mother—"Thou dost not understand!"

"He is my friend," he declared sternly. "A brother to me."

Her eyes widened in amazement, and contracted swiftly again. A flush mounted to her cheeks and her dainty lips curved with scorn. Very carefully she pulled her cloak over her shoulder and turned her back on him.

Puddlewhit looked at her grimly. Wheeling, he passed through the silent rows of Malaysians and returned to his own deck.

Teema was not in sight. Puddlewhit scoured the deck for him and finally found him in his cabin. Teema lay face down in his bunk, his head between his arms. He had not removed one of his dripping garments. His body shook with convulsive sobs.

Puddlewhit looked down upon him commiseratingly. Seating himself on the edge of the bunk he placed a friendly arm about the young man's neck. Teema swung it aside as he felt the touch and leaped to his feet. Through the sweaty, salty grime of tears his face glowed an angry red. His fierce, black eyes glittered with passion and a vengeful fury.

"Thou hast seen!" he barked in short, staccato sentences. "Thou knowest now in what esteem they hold me. Why? Because my father and my mother were of alien bloods. Were they not joined in wedlock? Why, then, should I be called unclean?"

"It is unjust, Teema," Puddlewhit agreed sadly. "I cannot understand it."

"Being white, thou canst not," Teema agreed. "Thou knowest not the loathing that the mandarin blood has for mixed blood. And the lesser apes chatter the same tongue. I could kill them all, I could tear them in pieces and feed the carcasses to the vultures." He hissed the words through clenched teeth, his long fingers clawing the air.

"No, Teema," Puddlewhit dissented mildly. "You must control your passions. Remember, you are a king."

"And be a dunghill for their taunts?" Teema flared. "No, a thousand times no! Burn, kill, destroy till they dare not breathe the name of Teema Doud, even in whispers. Oh, if I had fifty of my Battahs here, how the laughter of these dogs would rattle in their slit throats."

"You are not yourself, Teema," Puddlewhit returned gently, rising. "I shall speak with you to-morrow again."

II.

PUDDLEWHIT awoke an hour or two after midnight with the nightmare sensation of slipping off the edge of a precipice into an abyss. A brief examination revealed that the horizontal plane of his bunk had been rudely disturbed. He heard the engines chugging hysterically below, but missed the concomitant sense of motion.

"A. Puddlewhit," he observed, "this damned tub must be astraddle a mudbank."

He dressed, and yawning sleepily, ambled to Teema's stateroom. That was not surprising, considering the circumstances, but what was mystifying was the fact that the bed had not been disturbed. Apparently Teema had been on deck all night. Too sleepy to ponder on the mystery, he went in search of him.

The night was warm as milk from a cow. Big stars gleamed luminous from a low-hanging heaven, pouring their soft radiance on a phosphorescent sea. The shore line was a vague silhouette of mangrove tops, pillowed on sable gloom. It was impossible to tell where sea ended and shore began. The packet might have been a mile from the rough-edged horizon or a hundred yards; all sense of distance lost itself in the brooding darkness. The yellow sea undulated in rhythmical swells.

There was no alarm yet, only discomfort. The packet's nose had run high on the bank, leaving her deck tilted at a considerable angle. Puddlewhit sought the captain. He was a puffy fellow, short-statured and onion-bellied. The tropic sun had found a peculiar pleasure in parboiling both his complexion and disposition a hectic red. Puddlewhit found him characteristically profane and out of breath.

"Judas Iscariot!" he bellowed at an unfortunate member of the watch. "Don't tell me there was no surf to mark the bank. A sailor could feel mud. He could smell mud. He wouldn't need no *verdampste* surf. You were asleep, or drunk, or God knows what. Get out of here."

He discovered Puddlewhit at his elbow.

"Ach, Mynheer Puddlewhit!" he exclaimed apologetically. "A thousand pardons, *mynheer*. But, you see, I leave the deck to catch a few hours' sleep. Then what happens? These oxen, these buffaloes, these thrice-damned *domkoppes*, run my ship aground. By the great king Nebuchadnezzar, they couldn't see the whole *verdampste* island of Sumatra when it was stuck up in front of them. Now we are high and dry till the next tide. And the devil knows whether we will get off then. Such sailors they breed nowadays. Shades of Piet Heyn and the Silver Fleet, what has Holland come to?"

"There's no danger?" Puddlewhit asked.

"Not unless it should blow. The barometer is a bit low. Oh—" He cast an anxious eye shoreward. "If there are Battahs over there"—he nodded toward the mangroves—"Heaven help us!"

"Would they attack a ship as large as this?" Puddlewhit inquired calmly.

"They attacked and took walled Keumala," the captain returned grimly. "I think those devils would dare anything. The worst of it is, we haven't above a couple of dozen rifles to defend ourselves with."

"What are the prospects for being sighted by another ship?" Puddlewhit continued evenly.

"Very slim. We are east and north of the regular lanes of traffic. There is probably no more deserted strip on the whole north coast," the skipper acknowledged pessimistically.

"Ah! That is why you have not used rockets?"

"*Precies, mynheer!* It would only give notice to every murdering brownskin for twenty miles around that we are in distress. Ha! What is that?" he exclaimed.

He clutched Puddlewhit's arm and pointed into the darkness. Puddlewhit saw

nothing at first. Then he saw, or fancied he saw, a thin sliver of light, appearing for a moment and vanishing again. It was a fairy gleam, a will-o'-the-wisp, so faint and evanescent as to make one doubt he had seen it. But doubt became certitude a moment later when it appeared and vanished again.

"You saw it, too?" the captain asked in a hushed voice.

"A wisp of light?" Puddlewhit asked. "Like a flash of starlight on a paddle blade?"

"Yes," the skipper assented huskily. "The gnats are gathering, *mynheer*. I am afraid they carry a sting."

Puddlewhit became apprised, through a sixth sense, of a third presence on the bridge. He had seen or heard nothing, the approach had been so stealthy. He turned and saw a slim figure garbed in *sarong* and *kabaya*. It was Teema. The young man's eyes glowed brilliantly as the stars above.

"I had forgotten," Puddlewhit exclaimed with relief. "Teema is with us, and these are his people."

At the mention of his name, Teema glided forward.

"They come!" he uttered in a low, sibilant whisper. His keen eyes, jungle bred, scanned the murk enshrouded shore line, picking up details wholly invisible to the others.

"You must tell them to keep away, Teema," Puddlewhit directed quietly.

Teema's eyes glittered and he pulled back half a step. "They come for their king," he declared sternly. "I shall go to them."

The skipper gave voice to an inarticulate exclamation, like the angry growl of a bear. The next moment he held an ugly automatic pointed at Teema's breast.

"We'll hold you as a hostage," he snarled. "Tell them to keep away, or—" The pistol completed the threat.

"Teema will listen to me, *mynheer kapitein*," Puddlewhit interrupted calmly. "We do not need—no, Teema!" he cried sharply.

The warning came too late. Teema had leaped, lithely as a panther. The skipper, accustomed to dealing with coolies and the dregs of the native water fronts, had underestimated his man. There was a shot that

went skyward, a woman's scream below, and the crash of two bodies on the bridge.

The skipper was a powerful brute, short, stocky, and sound as oak, his muscles toughened by the hard training of the sea. But Teema, though more slenderly built, was tempered steel. He fought with the skill and cunning of a leopard, and the cold ferocity of its Bengal cousin, the tiger. Before Puddlewhit could intervene the captain's gun shot out of the struggling mass, executed a parabola and plunged deep into the shadowy cushion of a huge roller. At the same moment the mass integrated itself into its two components, Teema bounding back to his feet with the elasticity of a rubber ball.

The skipper's eyes were bloodshot. "Mutiny!" he bellowed, making for Teema, but Puddlewhit stepped in between.

"*Mynheer kapitein*," he reminded him sternly, "what were your instructions from his excellency regarding this passenger?"

The captain came to his senses.

"This man must be confined to his room," he declared thickly, breathing heavily. "The safety of the ship demands it."

"No, *mynheer kapitein*," Puddlewhit contradicted in a low voice, pointing to the shadowy outlines gathering on the edge of the blanket of murk, "the safety of the ship demands that we reach an understanding."

He turned to Teema, watching them sharply, catwise. "Teema," he inquired steadily, "a moment ago you said you were going to your people. What does that mean?"

"Thou shalt come with me, my benefactor," Teema returned placidly. "Thou and all these people."

"What if we prefer to remain here?"

Teema bared his teeth in an engaging grin.

"You must accept our hospitality, my benefactor," he returned.

The captain growled thickly, and Teema threw him a watchful glance.

"Then your promise means nothing now that the tables appear turned," Puddlewhit declared sternly.

"Thou art my friend, dost thou fear to go with me?" Teema countered.

"I have none dependent on me," A. Puddlewhit replied calmly. "Therefore I need never be afraid. But what of the others? A thought occurred to him. "What of the little yellow woman below and her child?"

A strange, inexplicable expression flitted across Teema's face. Puddlewhit caught only a vague and unsatisfactory glimpse of it in the uncertain light, but it astonished and puzzled him. There was vindictiveness in it, and pain, yet a strange tenderness, too. Before he could pursue his inquiry Teema answered:

"They will have justice. Those yellow dogs, *ingeh*, and the woman, too. The yellow-white man's justice."

"I think I prefer to stay here," Puddlewhit declared calmly.

Teema laughed, stepped forward, and linked his arm within his benefactor's.

"Thou art not observing, kind-hearted," he reproved with cheerful good humor. "Nor is *mynheer*, the *kapitein*, for all his years at sea. Look to the east."

On the far horizon, where a few minutes before stars had gleamed till the sea snuffed them out, a darkness was developing, more ominous than the darkness ahead. It was rising swiftly, obscuring the heavens like a dash of the hand over a blackboard, its somber opacity becoming more dense each moment.

"*Lieve God!*" the skipper gasped.

"We have just time to get you all ashore before the hurricane breaks," Teema broke in sharply. "Get your boats off, captain. I will call in my Battahs to assist."

He whistled shrilly twice. There was a stirring in the gloom shoreward, faint, shadowy outlines became discernible in the murk, revealing themselves rapidly as long, slim canoes with several paddlers in each.

From the west came a droning sound, like the noise made by a swarm of hornets in a forest glade. The captain, who had disappeared for a moment from the bridge, rejoined them.

"It is going to blow and blow hard, *mynheer*," he announced. "I am afraid we haven't much of a chance on this mud bank." He turned abruptly to Teema. "Do you know this coast?" he demanded.

"Fairly well," the ex-coolie admitted.

"Can we make a landing? Or is it all swamp?"

"If you follow the canoes. There's a creek mouth, with a fairly good flow of water, enough to float the boats. A quarter of a mile upstream there's a village."

"How the devil do you know this spot so exactly?" the skipper cried amazedly.

"I spoke to one of my Battahs in a sampan just before we struck," Teema returned coolly. "This is the outer edge of Kadjoë bank."

"Before we struck! Then—" The skipper checked himself. He cast a furious glance at the unabashed and smiling Teema and ordered boats to be lowered.

It was high time. The droning sound from the far west had increased in volume to a pronounced humming, like the noise of a top magnified many times. What little sea there was flattened out. The surface of the waters had an oily, yellow aspect; the phosphorescence was fading. There was considerable commotion on the lower deck, but the exhausted swarm bedded there had not yet become fully aroused to its danger, except the few who were seawise and already making for the boats.

Realizing their peril, the crew worked swiftly and methodically. Several canoes ranged alongside and the agile Malaysians and Chinamen of the second and third class passenger list had little difficulty in dropping into them, for the packet's decks were not high. Each craft turned swiftly shoreward when it had received its load.

At the first call to the boats Puddlewhit hurried below to find the lady from Macassar and her child. The deck swarmed with a frightened mob, milling back and forth between the boats, and he had great difficulty in forcing his way through the throng. For once his diminutiveness was a pronounced handicap. He found her at last, near the bow, and wholly deserted by her compatriots. She was holding the still sleeping boy tightly in her arms.

"I thought you would come," she declared simply, and Puddlewhit, who prided himself on his lack of emotion, felt a thrill at this testimony of her confidence.

"We must hurry," he returned laconically, taking the child from her.

They found room in the last boat. The humming had become a roaring now, a mighty volume of sound that poured in from every point of the compass. The blackness was abysmal.

The captain leaped down. "Make off," he shouted. "We've got to run for it. My God, a woman!" as he caught sight of the lady from Macassar.

As the boat leaped forward under the stroke of the oars a slim figure vaulted the rail and cleaved the seas behind them. The next moment a head rose alongside the boat. The skipper grasped the shock of hair and pulled the swimmer in.

"You!" he bellowed as he recognized Teema. "I thought I was the last man to leave the ship."

"I could not find Mynheer Puddlewhit," Teema replied in a low whisper.

The skipper stared at him incredulously for a moment. Then he impulsively wrung Teema's hand. "By Heaven, you're a man!" he exclaimed.

A precipitous white surf wall suddenly rose on both sides of the packet, higher than its decks. It bore the doomed craft irresistibly toward them. For a moment it seemed that they must be crushed by the huge bulk of the ship, then it passed a scant rod to the right. At the same instant the surf struck them, flinging them skyward, holding them suspended for an instant on its crest in a smother of spray, then whirling them forward at an incredible speed.

It was a miracle that they were not swamped. Oars were of no use; they were a plaything of the elements and the sea. Whirling, spinning in a vortex of waters, they were hurled toward the mangrove lined shore.

Teema, staring ahead, suddenly bent down and tore an oar from one of the sailor's hands. He pulled desperately, bending the stout ash like a bow. The boat moved ahead a trifle. The next instant they leaped through an opening between the trees and shot along a narrow channel.

"By the grace of God, we've made it!" the skipper exclaimed reverently as the mighty wave gradually exhausted itself be-

tween the narrow banks. Behind them they heard the hurricane howl and batter the coast with seas mountain high. The wind, rushing up the creek funnel, shrieked in their ears and lashed them with spray. But the mangrove wall was too deeply rooted to be laid low by even the violence of the tempest.

They rowed swiftly on, Teema guiding them. By and by lights appeared. They were torches, carried by Battahs, lining the village water front. A shout of acclaim rose from the hillmen as they heard Teema's whistle. Willing hands pulled their craft high inshore and helped them alight.

Further sleep that night was, of course, impossible. The rain came five minutes after they landed, great sheets of it, heavy as surf, and no less violent. It poured off the high pitched *attap* roofs of the village in a miniature Niagara, sluicing the soft mud on which the huts rested, into the swollen river. The lady from Macassar and Puddlewhit took refuge with their erstwhile shipmates in the long community house. There was an open fire on the baked clay hearth at the center of the dwelling. The whites circled the blaze, with the Chinese in the second row, and the Malaysians beyond. The Battahs stood, or squatted, along the walls, watching their guests. There was a sinister quality in their watchfulness, thought Puddlewhit, as he looked around for Teema Doud and failed to find him.

No one spoke or moved. In fact, conversation was impossible, so deafening was the continuous roll of thunder and the wash of waters. The fire burned petulantly and without life, filling the house with smoke. Through the gray haze Puddlewhit discerned from time to time, as the lightning flashed vividly through the chinks between the bamboo, the vicious, leering faces of the monkey men of the hills, Teema's subjects. They were well armed, he saw, every man had his spear and a kris or *padang*.

Others were uneasy, too, he noticed. Here and there, among his shipmates, were men gray with fear, and others that kept their hands within their blouses where, no doubt, a knife lay hidden. On the outer periphery of the circle there was an uneasy milling to

get nearer the fire. The master of the vessel, seated near Puddlewhit, fidgeted and swore in muttered exclamations as he cast furtive, ratlike glances in every corner of the room. There was the look of a treed lynx in his eyes, the brute courage of the beast that, trapped, dies hopelessly, but fighting to the last.

"We're going to have trouble," he murmured in a broken aside to Puddlewhit. And later: "When are they going to begin? Like to have it over. Wish I had that gun Teema got off me."

The lady from Macassar touched Puddlewhit's arm. Her black eyes met his, cool, calm, and unafraid. Not a vestige of anxiety marred her placid countenance, even her coiffure was unruffled by the storm. The boy slept quietly on her bosom.

"They are afraid," she said, nodding toward their shipmates. "Cannot you say something to calm their fears?"

Her sublime confidence in his omnipotence brought a smile to Puddlewhit's careworn features.

"It is better that Teema Doud should speak," he replied in a low voice. "He is their king."

"Who?" she asked in a puzzled tone.

"He who saved your child yesterday," he returned.

Her eyes became fixed and staring upon him. The color swiftly receded from her face.

"The *peranakan tjina*?" she gasped.

Puddlewhit pressed her hand reassuringly. "Have no fear," he said. "He is my friend, and he owes me much."

She pressed the boy to her bosom, with her cheek on his. A fierce, maternal anguish contorted her features. The child wriggled uncomfortably in its sleep.

"Siva help us," she groaned. "I go to my death."

Puddlewhit smiled at her fears. "I told you he was my friend," he remonstrated gently. "Forget what has passed between you."

"Thou dost not understand," she murmured brokenly. Puddlewhit started back, it was the same expression Teema had used. "Thou dost not know the hate of the half-blood," she continued. Lowering

her head, she rocked the fretting child in her arms while hot, scalding tears flowed unimpeded down her cheeks.

Puddlewhit rose with resolution and made his way through the mob toward a hideous long-haired, wizened Battah, evidently chief of those within the hut. He was crooked with age and disfigured with the scars of scores of self-inflicted wounds, but the glitter in his pig-like eyes and the downward curve of his thin, lacerated lips told of a savage cruelty and lust for blood and cold ferocity, untamed by the passing years. As Puddlewhit approached he suddenly threw up his spear and placed the poisoned tip on the rattan merchant's breast.

"I would have speech with Teema Doud, king of the Battahs," Puddlewhit announced calmly in the Battah tongue, indifferent to the multitude of staring eyes fixed upon him from every corner.

The chief's eyes glittered. Uttering no sound, he pointed a long, skinny finger toward the seat at the fire which Puddlewhit had relinquished. The rattan dealer saw the uselessness of argument. Turning with dignity he retraced his steps and seated himself. In the hush that followed, the patter of the rain on the roof and the rumbling of fast dying thunder sounded with tenfold clearness.

Many of those who had escaped the wreck carried weapons of a sort. Following this incident, Puddlewhit saw that his shipmates more generally were slipping their hands into their blouses or under their sashes in search of *pisau*s and curved Negara blades. A few were plainly panic-stricken, but for the most part the little company of shipwrecked voyagers was prepared to sell their lives dearly. White men and yellow and brown would stand shoulder to shoulder against the long-haired atavisms of the jungle, throw-backs to the days when man was emerging from the beast state.

A word, a false motion, and the interior of the hut would be converted into a shambles, Puddlewhit knew. That word, that motion must not be made until Teema Doud returned, he resolved. His heart beat violently, although outwardly he was perfectly calm.

"Where is Teema?" was the question that repeated itself over and over again in his burning brain as he looked anxiously toward the entrance of the long hall, where the Battahs had converged the most thickly. "Pray God, he come in time," he breathed silently and prayerfully.

The fire died low. None thought to replenish it. Through the chinks in the bamboo the gray dawn came stealing, filtering gradually through a leafy canopy of *manggwa* and agapetes-tree. In the far distance a wild jungle-cock uttered its matin welcome to the sun. But none stirred within the hut. A gecko, crawling from its nocturnal security among the broad-leaved palm thatch, lost its grip and fell into the fire. But not a voice was raised, though the women shivered.

Presently there was a stirring at the entrance. A messenger entered and spoke to the chief of the Battahs. That dignitary strode crouching through the ranks of his involuntary guests, his sharp, ferret eyes alert for a hostile move. Approaching Puddlewhit he said curtly, in the Battah tongue:

"The king would speak with thee, baboon."

Puddlewhit did not lift his eyes from the fire. He was thinking. If he left now, he said to himself, the blow would fall. He would escape, and he alone. There would be no witnesses to prove the massacre was unprovoked.

"Tell the king I am here," he returned calmly and dispassionately, in the same language.

The chief looked puzzled for a moment. Then an angry gleam appeared in his eyes. Gripping his spear and pulling it back with a menacing motion, he announced more loudly, in deep, guttural tones;

"Teema Doud, the king, sends for thee, baboon."

Again came the reply, without change of tone, or inflection:

"Tell the king I am here."

The chief scowled and paused uncertainly. The point of his spear dropped to the floor as he scratched his woolly head in perplexity and stared down on the unobservant Puddlewhit, who continued his calm scrutiny of the dying embers.

He was plainly at a loss what to do. Twice he bent and reached a long, skinny claw toward Puddlewhit's shoulders, and twice he straightened again and withdrew his hand. Reaching a decision, finally he wheeled, darted a ferocious glance at the watchful but unexpressive wreck victims, and shuffled back to the messenger, who darted away with a whispered order from his chief.

There was a brief interim of silence, then the door of the hut swung wide. The Battahs who had been squatting on the floor swiftly rose to their feet and as swiftly bent till their noses touched the ground.

Teema walked grandly in, a transformed Teema. The silks and satins of a rajah draped his form, rose and emerald green, with a flashing ruby in his *toppi* turban and a long, curved blade at his side. He strode slowly and resplendently down the long hall through the ranks of his recumbent subjects with the grace and elegant languor of one to royal honors born. A gesture of his hand and the fierce-visaged Battah chief slunk back against the wall.

Reaching Puddlewhit, he halted. The little man's head slowly lifted. He observed Teema's magnificence from foot to head and head to foot again, missing no detail. A ghost of a smile lurked in the corners of his mouth.

Teema's face was flushed with pride and gratified vanity. There was a new-born arrogance in his tilted chin and puffed chest and the swing of his shoulders. His eyes roamed slowly and significantly over the wreck victims. Puddlewhit saw the vindictive gleam that came into them every time they rested upon one of those who had laughed at him and called him "*peranakan tjina*," the day before.

Presently he glanced down at the lady from Macassar. She was still holding her slumbering child close to her bosom. Her calm, clear eyes met his without fear. There was a peculiar exultation in his look for a moment, then a granite frigidity impressed itself upon his features. He continued staring at her, like one who dislikes to relinquish his moment of triumph, finding it all too short. Presently his glance shifted to the boy and then back to her. She

gripped the child convulsively and a look of horror came into her face.

Teema turned swiftly to Puddlewhit.

"I am here, my benefactor," he announced in clear, ringing tones. "What would you have of me?"

A. Puddlewhit weighed his words before replying.

"Food for us all," he declared laconically. "A place to sleep. The removal of these Battahs and a guarantee of thy protection. A messenger to the nearest port that a ship may be sent for us."

His gray eyes met Teema's dark ones inquiringly. A twinkle came into those of the young ruler.

"Thou art an inhospitable host, my benefactor," he twitted slyly. "Thou hast not asked me to sit."

"The house is thine, Teema, sit," Puddlewhit returned without change of countenance.

"No, my benefactor, from the moment thou didst step within, it was thine," Teema returned pleasantly, seating himself.

"Then let me have it undisturbed," Puddlewhit declared promptly.

Teema laughed. "In due time, my friend," he replied. "Now as to thy requests. Food, it shall be brought to you. A place to rest you have. But as to sending a messenger, I ask thee, father of goodness, does the leopard, once free of the cage, willingly return?"

"Art thou free, Teema?" Puddlewhit asked quietly.

Teema looked around at his watchful Battahs. More of them had crowded inside the log house since his arrival, they now outnumbered the victims of the wreck three to one. They were all heavily armed.

"It would seem so," he returned, with a quizzical smile.

"Art thou free, Teema?" Puddlewhit asked again, without change of tone.

The young man looked puzzled. "Explain thyself, my friend," he returned tartly. "I do not like riddles."

"I was thinking," A. Puddlewhit replied, staring into the fire, "of thy promise to me, Teema."

The merry, insouciant expression left Teema's face. He stroked his chin thought-

fully, with a furtive glance at the little gray-haired man beside him. Presently he nodded.

"I understand," he replied with dignity. "Thou hast bound me with the fetters of my word. Teema's promise is good. But—" He paused significantly.

"I am king here, am I not?" he demanded.

"If thou keepest the agreement," Puddlewhit returned, with sudden doubt.

"I shall keep the agreement," Teema assured him. "But this morning, when the sun is the fourth hour high, thou shalt see my justice, the justice of the king of the Battahs. Until then ye have leave to roam about as ye will, except that ye cannot stir beyond the limits of the village clearing. That is to avoid accident. Food will be brought here at once. *Koela moendoer!*—I depart in all politeness."

With a mocking smile and an enigmatic twinkle in his eyes he leaped to his feet and strode away, the procession of Battahs following.

III.

THEY had breakfasted. The food offered them was plentiful and good, breadfruit and rambutan and mangosteens, with the sweet milk of ripening coconuts and a mildly alcoholic *tuak*, or palm wine, for drink. Baked *ikan* was served also, but this Puddlewhit declined, although the Malaysians and some of the Chinese ate it with relish. It was the one flaw in the little man's perfect adaptability to Malaysian customs and mode of living, but then, no white man has ever come to look upon the sun baked fish of the humid tropics as a delicacy.

The lady from Macassar toyed with a purple rambutan.

"I heard," she said simply, referring to Teema's parting threat. "He is young, he will not listen to thee. No matter how great the debt he owes thee. Power is sweet to him, the taste does not yet cloy, and the exercise of power has not yet taught him discretion. Having seen bloodshed and much oppression in his boyhood, life weighs lightly in the scales with him. We can die but once. Who knows what awaits us in the next incarnation?"

"Now, such talk is foolishness," Puddlewhit gently expostulated, smiling at her fears.

"I marked the vengeance in his eyes," she returned, shuddering. A brave smile lit her lips. "But my child will be safe. The rajah risked his life for the boy's once, he cannot take now that which he has given. As for me, it matters not. I am growing old, and the sands of my life are running low. What matters a few hours more or less? I have drunk to the full of the misery of this world. One thing I would ask thee, my friend. When I am gone, take the boy with thee to the home of his uncle, Wu Chow, dealer in *toko-artikelen* at the *pasar* of Keumala. You will do this for me?"

"Wu Chow?" Puddlewhit exclaimed in surprise. "That is my sister-in-law's second husband."

The lady from Macassar smiled. "Fate spins queer threads for us," she observed musically. "We walk blindly and by and by the paths from far quarters meet. Since thou knowest Wu Chow, this will not be a burden to thee, will it?" she inquired anxiously.

Puddlewhit leaned back and looked around before replying. They were quite alone. The others had gone into the open after their meal, like fowls sunning themselves. A dim, cathedral light poured in through the interstices between the bamboo, filling the long nave. Pigs grunted in the well filled wallows below and poultry scratched industriously along the runways created by the rain.

"Of course," he returned reassuringly, "I shall do as you request, if it be necessary. But I know it will not. You yourself will bring the boy to his uncle. Teema is not the sort of man you believe him to be. He is young, yes, but not cruel. And he will listen to me—"

She placed a protesting hand on his arm. It was the first time she had been so familiar.

"Listen, my friend," she said. "It is you who do not understand. You do not know the hot blood that flows in the veins of the *peranakan tjina*. Yellow and white, mix them and they are fuel and flame, consuming yet never consumed. You do not

know the gulf that exists between the yellow man and him whose blood is roiled.

"You are proud of your races and royal-ties, you whites, but what are you? Children of a day, your oldest dynasties reaching back only a few hundred years. Long before your America was, we were; long before your Europe was, we were. Civilization was old, like a man grown gray, in China when your ancestors still lived in trees, like these Battahs, or scabbled in caves. Do you wonder that we are proud of our blood? Do you wonder that we hold in scorn and contempt him in whom it is defiled? Do you wonder that to us the *peranakan tjina* is as the leper and the pariah, a creature unutterably loathsome, with whom contact is defilement? Hated thus, is it strange that they return the hate with a virulence as great as our own? Speak with the young man, he will tell you—"

She wrung her hands. Lines of anguish seared her proud face, shame and pain contending.

"I know whereof I speak, my friend," she cried bitterly. "I committed the unforgivable sin of my people once. I had a white husband—a child. That was long ago. Death took them both, blessed release for my babe. He disappeared, later they told me the great sea had swallowed him. It is well. Else the suffering that is this sorry king's might be his. Let him ease his wrath on me. Let him have his hour of hate satisfied and lust for vengeance appeased." She sighed resignedly.

Puddlewhit glanced at her thoughtfully and stroked his chin.

"You had a child by a white husband once?" he asked.

"Yes," she acknowledged in a whisper.

"If he be as you say, you have given me the golden key that will unlock his stubborn heart," Puddlewhit declared with relief and conviction. "Have faith, you shall live with your child."

The door opened and a Battah shambled in. After him came another, a long procession of Battahs. The hour of Teema's justice had arrived. One by one the male members of the tribe filed in, all of them armed to the teeth, and took their places

along the walls. In the rear, closely guarded, marched the victims of the wreck. Last of all came Teema.

He walked slowly and sedately down the long hall, with two warriors on each side. As he neared the lady from Macassar and Puddlewhit his eyes rested on them for a moment, then passed quickly on. There was an elevated platform near the clay hearth, and this he mounted. Puddlewhit tried to intercept him as he passed, but a brownny Battah intervened and pressed him back.

"Teema, I want a word with you," Puddlewhit cried desperately, in English.

The coolie king glanced at him sternly. "It is not necessary," he returned significantly. "Thou shalt see the justice of Teema Doud."

His glance passed on the length of the long hall to the guard at the door.

"Let the baskets be brought in," he directed in the language of his people.

The Battahs at the entrance stood aside. A wrinkled hag shuffled in. Her back was crooked with age and she leaned heavily on a staff. She was the very picture of the wicked old woman of fairy tales, only much more wrinkled and fiendish in expression. Her garments were indescribably filthy, and as she hobbled in she leered evilly at those about her, evidently proud of her momentary prominence. Such a woman, Puddlewhit thought as he looked at her in horror, could cheerfully thrust a red hot iron into a shrinking victim's flesh. She carried a basket of woven reed about a foot high, handling it gingerly so that it did not come too near her person.

Behind her was a slender, olive cheeked girl, with bright, black eyes and a shy, pleasing smile. Her head and body were wreathed with garlands of oleander, jasmine, and flaming hibiscus. She also carried a basket, similar in shape and size to the old woman's.

Girl and hag proceeded through the ranks of Battahs and wreck victims until they reached Teema. They placed the baskets on the platform before him and retired.

Teema rose. A royal figure he looked in his rajahal robes and vestments.

"One of these baskets contains life, and

protection for you all, and my friendship," he announced. "The other contains—death!" He paused, and his eyes roamed the assemblage. There was silence in the hall, only the sound of rapid breathing could be heard.

His glance rested on the lady from Macassar.

"We shall let this woman choose," he announced.

"Teema!" Puddlewhit cried in sharp ex-postulation. A grimy brown paw closed over his mouth and shut off further utterance.

The lady from Macassar rose. She swayed a trifle, but instantly recovered. With proud mien and firm and unfaltering step she walked toward the platform and paused before the baskets, scanning them speculatively.

The hush was profound. In the utter silence the guttural grunting of the pigs below and the clucking of fowls grated discordantly as the grinding of machinery in a deep forest. The lady from Macassar reached a tentative hand toward the basket which the hag had brought in. She was watching Teema's eyes. Puddlewhit, staring intently, saw a momentary doubt come into the young ruler's face and his limbs stiffen.

As her fingers touched the basket a hissing sound came from within, then a dull, padded blow. She shrank away, her face blanching. Timidly she extended her hand toward the other basket, the basket the flower decked girl had brought.

"This is your choice?" Teema demanded in a sharp, strained voice.

She looked at him. Doubt was in her eyes, doubt and fear both. More than her own life depended on her action, she knew. Something she saw in Teema's face decided her.

"It is," she declared in a low whisper.

"It is well," Teema pronounced sonorously. He drew his kris and leaped eagerly forward. The shining blade executed an arc and came down upon the rejected basket. As it clove the straw in twain, a living, writhing something parted with it. Twice the stroke was repeated and the third blow separated the cobra's head from its body.

The lady from Macassar drew back, shuddering, her eyes fixed fascinatedly upon Teema's.

"Thus perish hate!" Teema cried exultingly. "Now open your basket," he commanded.

Her hands trembled. At first it seemed as though she intended to refuse. But under Teema's compelling gaze she reached forward and carefully removed the cover.

The shadow of a smile began to play over Teema's saturnine features.

"Look within," he commanded.

She did so. Puddlewhit saw her face become suddenly gray. She lifted a hand

to her throat, as though strangling, then started back and would have fallen had not Teema leaped down and caught her in his arms. Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck and broke into a passion of sobbing. He held her tenderly.

An inscrutable smile began to play about Puddlewhit's lips. As their mystified shipmates looked from Teema to him and back again, he stepped forward and glanced into the basket. His head inclined in a nod of assent.

"As I thought, the crucifix," he said. Lifting his lips to Teema's ear he whispered:

"Son, kiss thy mother."

Next Week: THE PSEUDO RAJAH

IN THE ORCHARD AT DALVENI

O H! Here beneath this roof of green
I throw me down and dream again
The golden dreams of what has been
The future harvests yet to gain!

The wheat waves in the field close by;
An apple, ripened ere its time,
Drops from the tree; the sun's great eye
Seeks through the leaves, and as I rime

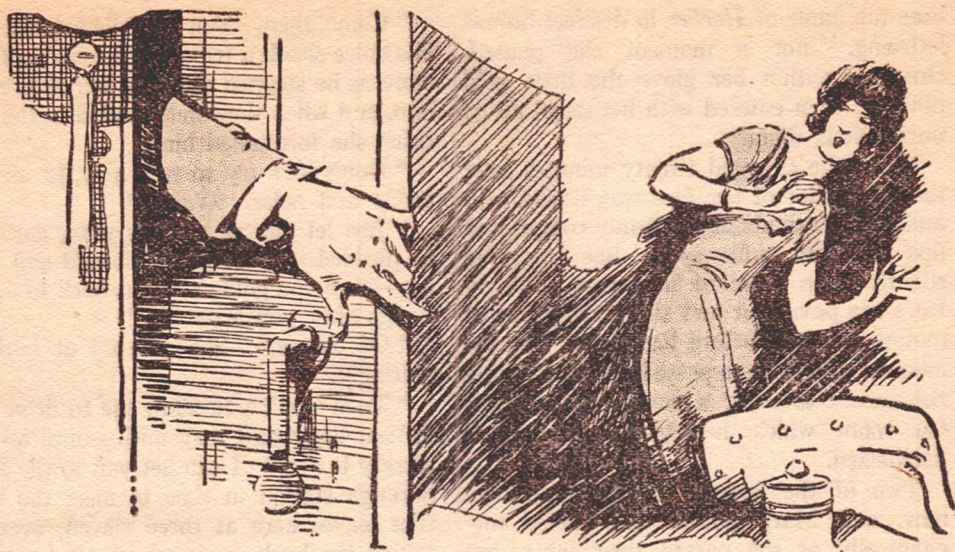
The birds weave to and fro and sing
The very songs I would declare,
And now and then the branches swing,
Stirred gentle by a wandering air.

The binders, clicking in the wheat,
The whistle of a passing train,
And distant noises of the street,
Are to my song a low refrain.

To-day! To-day I rest at ease
And pick the golden fruits that grow
In solitude on twigs of peace—
The fruits that only dreamers know.

But, oh! To-morrow's face must wear
The sober lines decreed by fate,
And all the ties of toil and care
Wait just beyond the orchard gate!

Herman Rave.



Liberation

By ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Annihilation," "McCarty Incog," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXPLAINED.

IN the fashionable shopping center of town, Mary descended from the bus and made her way to the line of telephone booths in one of the great hotels towering above the stores. It was after one o'clock, but she finally located Wesley King at a lunch club in the financial district.

"Mary?" His resonant voice held surprise mingled with half-incredulous joy. "I scarcely dared hope that you'd let me hear from you after our misunderstanding Thursday night!"

"Our misunderstanding?" she queried coldly.

"Of course you must have realized by now that I was only joking," he expostulated. "I admit, dear, that it was in decidedly bad taste, and you are such a serious, literal-minded little woman that I should have remembered, but surely you know—"

"It was in bad taste, Wesley, but never mind about that now," she interrupted. "I'm in town, and there's something I'd like to talk over with you."

"Heaven knows I want to see you, dear one!" he cried quickly. "Wherever you are, I'll come at once and take you to lunch."

"Thanks, I've had mine," Mary replied with a little shudder of distaste. "I'd like to see you quite alone. Would you care to meet me when you have finished and take me for a little spin through the park? I'll be here in the Rose Room at the Golconda Hotel."

"I'd love it, dearest! I've so much to say to you, too. I've been working on the matter you asked me to, and I think I'll have something to tell you."

"I think so, too, Wesley," she responded quietly. "In an hour, then."

Leaving him to ponder over her last words, she rang off and crossed the avenue to a small but somberly rich shop which

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bore the name of *Harlier* in discreet bronze lettering. For a moment she paused, clutching within her glove the little gold pin, and then entered with her usual air of unconscious dignity.

When she emerged twenty minutes later the soft pallor of her face was tinged with bluish shadows about her firmly compressed lips and dull, wide eyes. She staggered slightly as a wave of heat rose stiflingly from the pavement and the moving line of motors wavered before her vision, but the moment of weakness passed, and she turned the corner to enter a small but exclusive tea room which her mother sometimes patronized.

Two of the latter's friends were there now, and Mary bowed and smiled mechanically as she passed their table, but avoided the white-gloved hands outstretched to detain her. Food she must have, and stimulation to carry her through the forthcoming interview, for she knew that she would be compelled to call upon all her resources; but the tea was bitter, and the dainty sandwiches and cakes she ordered were tasteless in her mouth.

What would Wesley King volunteer to tell her? What would he say when she faced him with what she had learned? She knew that he was low-minded, vicious, pettily revengeful—was he utterly without honor? What hidden acts lay in the past of this man for whom she had so lightly been ready to cast off her people and all that had gone to make up her serene, sheltered life!

As she approached the hotel once more she saw the familiar flamboyant red car drawn up at the side-street entrance, and Wesley King himself greeted her in the foyer of the Rose Room.

"I was so afraid I had missed you." He spoke in a low, conventionally courteous tone, but she could feel his eyes devouring her. "I stopped to have the tank filled, and that took a few minutes, but I have a plan in mind."

"Yes?" Mary forced herself to answer as she withdrew her hand from his. "Will you tell me in the car? The heat has been rather overpowering to-day, and I'd like to go where it is quiet and cool."

"Come, then. You must be exhausted!" His voice shook a trifle, but he said nothing more as he stepped aside for her to precede him, and when they were settled in the machine she forestalled him.

"Don't let's try to talk now, in all this traffic and noise. Wait—"

"Just let me tell you my plan, darling," he pleaded. "The park is torrid and wilting—were you going straight back to Green Lodge after you leave me?"

"Of course." She glanced at him inquiringly.

"Then won't you allow me to drive you as near home as I may until—until all this secrecy is over? I can get you to the Scarborough station in time to meet the train that leaves here at three eleven, even by taking the back roads where we won't encounter any of your people's acquaintances, and you'll be spared that stuffy trip, at least." King bent forward, striving to look under her hat brim, for she had averted her face from him. "Please, dearest! Is it so much to ask of my wife?"

Mary hesitated. Most of their circle would be at the country club, and she would be nearer home, at least, when their interview was over.

"Very well," she said, finally. "It will be better, perhaps, than the park."

As though he sensed something strained and taut in her bearing, King said no more until they had left the city behind them and were whirling through the suburbs toward the open country. Then he asked casually:

"Is Lorrin still safe?"

"Quite." Mary was glad that he had opened the subject at last, and she half turned toward him. "You said you had something to tell me?"

"Something that you'll approve of, I think. It was your own suggestion. You see." His hand left the wheel to close over hers, and although she shrank inwardly, Mary endured his touch with apparent passivity. "When you ran from me in the grove the other night, and I realized that I'd offended you again, driven you from me, I was almost mad. It seemed to me that this separation between us would continue indefinitely if you held me to my

bargain, for honestly, dear, I didn't see how I could carry out such a task.

"It looked hopeless, as I told both you and Lorrin frankly, and after you left us he couldn't tell me anything that would help. I was pretty desperate when I returned to the city, and then I thought of your idea that I go straight to Wharton and tell him I thought he was wrong about that forgery."

"You—Wharton—" Mary stared.

"That's it," he nodded, smiling. "I faced him in his office and told him I was going to prove Lorrin's innocence."

"When did you see him?" Mary asked faintly.

"Yesterday morning. He tried to bluff and bluster, but I could see I had him going, and when I get a shred of evidence to take to him he'll come in with us, climb on the band wagon, so to speak, in order not to be left in the rôle of an unjust persecutor."

King paused as though awaiting commendation, but Mary merely queried:

"Have you your 'shred of evidence' yet, Wesley?"

"My dear child, can I produce it from empty air?" he asked in his turn, reproachfully. "With nothing to go upon yet, where could I get this evidence?"

Mary drew a deep breath, and her brows lifted a trifle as she gazed straight into his face.

"I thought, perhaps, from Richard Hill," she announced quietly. "Where have you hidden him, Wesley?"

The car swerved, but he jerked it savagely back toward the center of the road.

"Hill!" he echoed. "What on earth do you mean, Mary?"

"Just what I say," she replied evenly. "Hill went to you last night after Mrs. Lorrin had told him what we learned about him—"

"So it was Lorrin's mother who told you—" he broke off, and added in a careful tone: "Why should she or you think he would come to me? Why, he's just a clerk in Wharton's outer office, a fellow I hardly know. I saw him there yesterday morning and didn't even shake hands with him. So she's been hounding him, then,

and because he's keeping out of her way, she thinks he's in hiding somewhere? Really, Mary, the poor woman's mind must be a little deranged by her troubles. What an extraordinary thing she should imagine he would come to me."

"She doesn't," Mary assured him, fighting to keep back the sudden trembling that seized her. "It's another woman, Hill's wife, who believes that he went to you!"

"Hill's wife!" King turned the car abruptly under the shade of a group of trees by the side of the road. "Look here, Mary, let's have this out. Some one has certainly been filling your head with the weirdest nonsense. I never knew he had a wife, or anything else about him."

"What favor did Richard Hill grant you that gave him a hold over you? Why has he gone to you for money whenever he needed it—blackmail, they call it, don't they? You gave them a wedding present though you had never met his wife, and when you did you were introduced to her under a false name. Hill called to you twice that day in the park before you would obey and stop, and you were furious that you had to meet his wife at all."

The words were coming now in a rush from Mary's pale lips. "What does he know of the forgery for which George Lorrin was sent to prison? What does he know about you that forces you to shield him at the expense of that innocent man? I want the truth, Mr. Coyle."

"Mary, either you are mad or I am." King took off his cap and ran his hand distractedly through his dark hair. "Who is 'Coyle'? Has some one tried to make you believe that I ever posed under that name, or any other not my own? I don't understand, the whole thing's amazing."

"It was, to me," Mary remarked.

"My dear girl, it's all a mistake. Young Hill never did me a favor in his life. I tell you, I scarcely remembered him when I walked into the office yesterday. I never gave him a cent, much less a wedding present, and I don't know what you mean about a meeting in the park."

Hill was stammering in seemingly candid bewilderment, but Mary noticed that his hands were gripping the motionless wheel

until the stitching on his gloves was strained. "I don't believe he knows a thing about that forgery, he never struck me as being clever enough for that, and I'm certainly not shielding him at the expense of any one. Where in the world did you hear this wild tale?"

"From several sources, one a jewelry salesman at Harlier's," Mary answered distinctly. "That was the one mistake Mr. Coyle made when he gave the Hill's baby a set of little gold pins he charged them to your account. Here is one of them. Do you recognize it?"

King glanced down at the tiny, gleaming bar in her hand and then straight before him, and a long silence fell. Mary slipped the pin into her purse and waited. Would he try further evasion now? He had lied to her deliberately already; would he try to hoodwink her again?

But when at last Wesley King turned to her there was a shamed, pained look in his eyes and his voice was very low.

"Mary, I never meant that you should know. It's nothing really wrong, dear—nothing disgraceful. It's done by the biggest men every day, a mere matter of business. Your father himself will tell you so when he has forgiven us and I can talk it over freely with him in your presence. It wasn't only that I was afraid you, with your puritanical ideas, would misunderstand, but no man wants the girl he loves to know that he was ever a failure. I don't know how you learned about it, but you'll have to know the truth now."

"I am glad you acknowledge that!" Mary exclaimed. Failure? Business? Her brain was reeling. Could it be that there was really nothing disgraceful nor wrong, after all? He had lied; was he lying now?

"There's one thing I want to say first." His voice had steadied and his eyes gazed straight into hers. "Don't misjudge Dick Hill. He did do me a big favor once, and when he told me he'd settled down, given up the bright lights and was going to marry a nice girl, I sent him a set of table silver as a wedding present with my blessing.

"He never blackmailed me, but he did come to me once or twice when he was in

a little financial worry over domestic affairs and I was glad to help him out. I never had any particular desire to meet his wife, for we weren't what you might call social friends—she was a salesgirl or model in some shop, I understand; but I hadn't the least reason in the world for avoiding her, and I wasn't annoyed at being introduced to her, it was the way it was done."

"As 'Mr. Coyle'?" Mary asked frigidly, but she could feel the tension relaxing within her. Wesley did appear to be telling the truth. His story so far tallied with that of Mrs. Hill. What if she had judged him too hastily after all!

"Exactly." There was a humble, abashed note in his tones now, and his eyes were averted from her. "To explain that I'll have to go back to the beginning. While I was treasurer of some estates in old J. W.'s hands, I wasn't supposed to gamble in the stock market, but I did. The fever was in my blood."

"You were treasurer—and you gambled—" Mary's voice choked with horror and King broke in hastily:

"Good Heavens, not with funds entrusted to me, if that is what you mean! Mary, how can you have such a despicable opinion of me? I used my own money, of course—a few thousands that I'd saved or had left to me. All this happened nearly a year before—before Lorrin's trouble. I don't believe you know anything about the Wall Street game, but it was the old story. I speculated and lost. I had sense enough at the last, though, when I saw how things were bound to go, not to throw the little capital I had left into the same sinking boat, and when I was wiped out I owed my brokers four times as much as the little I had saved from the wreck.

"In order to pay them in full I had to have that to operate with; you can't make money without a certain amount to start with. If they'd known I had any assets at all they could have taken them from me, of course, and charged the rest of my account to profit and loss, but I was determined to pay them every penny. I had to keep that money some way—are you trying to understand, dear? It isn't easy to tell you."

"Go on," Mary said quietly. "I am listening. Where does 'Mr. Coyle' come in?"

"Right here!" King squared his shoulders. "If I kept a bank account of my own the brokers could have attached it. I had no intimate friends whom I would ask to open an account for me under their names—and then I thought of Dick Hill, in our office. He was a happy-go-lucky sort of chap, fun-loving, always living beyond his means, a trifle—well, dissipated, perhaps, but just an overgrown boy.

"He was constantly playing practical jokes around the office, and I knew that with his irresponsible nature he would be willing to take it on for me and think it rather a lark. I approached him about it, and he looked on it just as I had figured he would, but he was as much in debt almost as I, and didn't dare keep a bank account in his own name. He opened one for me under the name of 'Coyle'; I don't know how he came to hit upon it."

He paused again and glanced at her pleadingly, but as she did not speak, he went on:

"Don't you see, Mary? If I'd turned that money over to my brokers, even though it was rightfully theirs then, they would never have recovered the rest, but as it was, I skyrocketed that small capital, doubled and trebled and quadrupled it, and then more. I paid them back every cent and stood on my own feet again. It took me more than a year to do it, but when at last I was well out of the woods, I left old J. W. and went on speculating for myself, but in a more conservative way, and I—we're on the way to having a comfortable fortune, dear!

"I felt I owed a good part of it to Dick Hill, but every time he saw me afterward he thought it a fine joke to rag me about that 'Coyle' matter and I wanted to forget it.

"It was a case of the end justifying the means, if ever there was one, but I never wanted any one to know about it. That day in the park when Hill introduced me to his wife as 'Mr. Coyle' I was furious, as you remarked, to travel under an alias was abhorrent, but to explain to her would

have been out of the question. Do you see the predicament in which I was placed? I simply had to let the misunderstanding go on and pray that I never encountered her again."

Mary was thinking rapidly. His story was plausible enough and there were no discrepancies with the former one she had heard—but he had lied.

"Wesley," she began, at length. "I wish with all my heart that I could believe you, but you tried to lie to me. How can I have faith in your word?"

"At first, you mean, when you spoke of Hill's wife?" he asked eagerly. "I was trying to keep the truth from you, dear, afraid it would distress you, widen the breach between us. There was nothing wrong, as you see, and it belonged to the past, forgootten. Surely you can forgive that."

"I was thinking of something else," Mary remarked slowly. "Do you know what some one said about you? That you would never go far—you were too clever and not wise enough. I'm beginning to see what he meant."

"He? Who?" King flushed hotly. "Who's the man, and to whom was that opinion expressed, I should like to know?"

"The man was Mr. Wharton—'old J. W.,' as you call him, and he said it to me."

"Wharton said that—to you." The flush deepened. "When? Where did you meet him?"

"Yesterday afternoon, in his office, Wesley." There was a weary, hopeless note in her tone.

"You went to Wharton's office—to discuss me," he broke out harshly. Then with an effort he restrained himself. "You are my wife, Mary; nothing can change that. Was that the act of a wife, even in name?"

"I did not go there to discuss you but to learn what I could that might help to prove George Lorrin's innocence." Mary disclaimed with dignity. "In reviewing the case, Mr. Wharton happened to mention that you urged him to make an example of George Lorrin for the good of the office. Had you told me this I wouldn't have asked your help now, and you would have been spared the necessity of lying to me. Mr.

Wharton has not seen you for more than a year."

King muttered an ejaculation under his breath and for a moment was silent. Then he said in a strained tone:

"Yes, I lied to you. You forced me to, for you gave me an impossible duty to perform, an unfair one. I didn't know Lorrin personally, but from the face of the evidence which Wharton laid before me in conference at the time, I was convinced of Lorrin's guilt, just as the jury later confirmed my opinion. I acted as any honest man would have done, I urged that he be made to answer for it, and I am not ashamed of it.

"Now you believe Lorrin to be innocent and for your sake I am giving him the benefit of the doubt. I'm willing to do anything I can to find evidence against some one else, but I am not a detective and this would tax the resources of the greatest of them.

"Great heavens, Mary, do you realize what you are doing?—You are making an issue of this between us—between husband and wife! I told you I'd seen Wharton because you suggested it, and I wanted to placate you till I'd made some real headway, but I knew it would be the worst move possible. Lorrin himself couldn't give me the slightest lead, I told you that. Tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"Did Hill go to you last night?" she asked bluntly. "Don't lie any more, Wesley; it won't be of the least use."

"God knows I shan't!" he declared fervently. "Dick Hill did not come to me. I haven't seen him in four or five months. If he has gone away I know nothing about it, nor why."

"I saw him yesterday in Mr. Wharton's office. He looked like a man pursued by ghosts. Fear was written on his face. He watched me through the glass panel during my interview with Mr. Wharton. Last night Mrs. Lorrin called at his home and asked him what he knew of the forgery." Mary was stating the facts in their order as coldly and methodically as a lawyer might have done. "When she had gone he told his wife that he was, to use his expression, 'being framed,' and rushed from the house.

He has not been seen since. His wife knows of no one to whom he could have gone but his friend 'Mr. Coyle.' Wesley, are you hiding him now because of his help in that unlawful bank account?"

"Before heaven, no!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure of what you have told me? Dick is weak, irresponsible, but not bad. He hasn't any criminal tendencies, any dishonest ones, and if he had—well, I imagine that forgery must take a certain amount of skill, and nerve, and cleverness. Dick Hill doesn't possess any of these things. I'll never believe he is guilty."

"Then why did he run away?"

"Because he was scared, I suppose—if he has actually run away. He's settled down, got a fine little family and naturally doesn't want to be dragged into a sordid mess like this. Why Mrs. Lorrin should have gone to him, of all the other office employees, I can't understand. Who on earth put such an idea into her head?"

Mary did not reply, and after a glance at her immovable face, King shrugged.

"Well, I can't say anything more, Mary. I've told you everything I know, everything. You must believe it or not, as you please." He made a movement as though to start the engine again, but Mary stopped him.

"Hill ran away because, if he did not commit the forgery himself, he knows who did and is afraid to speak. If he didn't go to you last night, find him and bring him to me. You offered just now to do anything I ask; bring Richard Hill to me."

"Mary," King pleaded, "if his wife doesn't know where he is and the office can give no information, how can you expect me to find him? Don't you see how utterly unreasonable, unfair, you are, my dear? I've known nothing of his friends, his habits, since he married. I can't go to his wife as 'Coyle' and offer my assistance, but if you will take a check to her from me—you've been in touch with her, of course—and tell her to make whatever use of it she pleases in order to locate her husband?"

Mary shook her head.

"All the money she needs is at her disposal, Wesley. Her husband went to you before when in trouble; why not now?"

"You mean that you doubt my word?" he began bitterly. "I can't blame you, I suppose, after my lie about seeing Wharton, so we're at an impasse. You ask me to find a man whose own wife and closest associates can't locate; a man with whom I haven't been in touch for months. He may even be out of the country by now, and the world is wide; am I to search it?"

"If he should come to me I shall bring him to you. That is all I can promise, but I swear to you that I know no more where he is now than I know who committed that forgery."

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR ONE HELD DEAR.

THEY drove the rest of the way to Scarborough in silence, and Mary descended at the station just as her train pulled in. There was only time for King to clasp her hand, and she averted her eyes to avoid the entreaty in his. Each had said all that could be said between them for the moment and during the five minute run to Ossining she rested, feeling that never in all her life had she been so utterly worn and weary.

On reaching home at last she found that her mother was up but pale and listless and she kissed her with a stab of compunction, mentioning vaguely a visit to the shops in town and the friends she had encountered in the tea room. Behind Mrs. Greenough, Susan was making mysterious gestures in the doorway, and as soon as Mary could end the brief, constrained conversation she went up to her room, with her old nurse at her heels.

"Miss Mary," Susan shut the door and stood with her angular shoulders against it. "Your—the young gentleman is fair wild to see you, and it's threatening to leave, he is! 'Twas something his mother said to him this morning, I'm thinking, and when I got her away at last and went to take him a bit of hot lunch, everywan being out o' the way, he asked could he see you. I told him you'd gone to the city and he said would I ask you to let him speak to you the minute you got back. He looked

like something had hit him straight between the eyes!"

"Father isn't home yet?"

"No, Miss Mary. He phoned he'd be back in time for dinner, though."

"Then I'd better go to the studio now." Mary sighed. "Try to keep mother's attention engaged, and I'll slip in again as soon as I can, Susan."

The emotions of the day and the added strain through which she had just passed during her interview with Wesley King had left her limp and too exhausted to think. What urgent message George Lorrin could have for her it was impossible to imagine, and how much of what she had learned must she tell him? He had a right to know, of course, and yet she bore Wesley's name, she owed him a duty that must not be ignored.

Nils was in the garden and she was forced to make a detour back of the glen, but although there was no sign of life from the studio the door opened silently for a few inches before her as she mounted the porch steps and she found George Lorrin waiting on the wide, cold hearthstone.

"I was sure it must be you." He advanced with outstretched hand and she saw that he was haggard and hollow-eyed once more. "I'm sorry to ask you to run this added risk, but I felt that I must see you!"

"I've just returned from the city," Mary explained as she took the chair he drew forward for her. "The news your mother brought this morning was distressing."

"She said she had talked with you first, told you everything." He passed his hand over his eyes. "I didn't mean that she should. I didn't mean that you should be dragged any further into this miserable affair of mine than you have been already."

"Why?" Mary's eyes opened wide, but there was a sudden, deeper shadow in them. "You know that we—she and I—are working together—"

"You must not!" A hoarse note had come into his low tones. "I said to you once before, Miss Mary, in Mr. King's presence, that I would prefer not to have you make the attempt and I—my mother's news means more to me than I can explain. It has put a different face on the matter en-

tirely and I'm going to ask you to drop the investigation."

"To—drop—" Mary's voice failed her.

"Yes. I—I want to try to get away if I can, and disappear." He spoke with a sort of desperate earnestness that she could not mistake. "I shall have to take my chances sooner or later and it must be without further loss of time. I can never forget, never be sufficiently grateful—"

"But you can't mean this!" Mary exclaimed. "Surely you aren't giving up hope now, when we've something definite to go upon at last. You don't know what I've done, I haven't an opportunity to tell you but I've seen Hill."

"You've seen him?" Lorrin groaned. "For heaven's sake, where? I was afraid of this when you went to the city to-day, but my dear mother told me he had gone away."

"He has. It was yesterday that I saw him, in Mr. Wharton's office, but I saw then in his face and the way he watched me, that he was afraid of something and suspected my errand, though of course, he didn't know me. Mr. Lorrin, will you tell me why you didn't want me to find him?"

"Because I want to drop the investigation," he responded doggedly, a deep flush creeping slowly over his pale face. "I've changed my mind and the worst of it is that I can't explain. I know this must seem inexplicable to you, and wretchedly ungrateful after all you have done, but I don't want the truth ever to come out."

"But you escaped in order to prove your innocence," Mary said slowly, thunder-struck at his attitude. "You've lived just for that, and your mother—you know what it means to her. If you're captured you'll be taken back and you'll never leave those walls again alive."

"Perhaps. I can't help that," he shrugged. "It's a chance I'll have to take, and I can't impose further on your hospitality. I shall have to ask you to let me go and forget that I ever appealed to your generosity."

"That is preposterous!" Mary had started upright in her chair. "Do you think I'll permit you to do such a mad thing, that I'll stop now?"

"You must." There was a look of un-

utterable sadness but decision in the glance he bent upon her. "I would rather have my name branded forever. Please don't ask me any questions. I—I can't stand it. I can't answer them, I can only thank you and go."

"Don't you realize what it would mean?" Mary's voice broke with sudden pleading. "If you should manage to get away you'll have to live in hiding always, hunted, afraid in every minute of all the days and years to come of being found out. Richard Hill knows something, even if he wasn't actually concerned in that forgery. I'm sure of it, I saw his wife to-day, and I know he could clear you if he would."

"I don't want to be cleared." His hands clenched and she saw the sweat stand out upon his forehead. "I'd rather live for the rest of my life hidden and hunted, I'd rather go back to prison, than have any one else charged with this crime. That is the truth, Miss Mary. I don't want my innocence proved."

"Then you know who is guilty," Mary accused him. "You're trying to shield him. But why? Why?"

"I don't know; I don't want to," he declared. "I simply don't want the matter gone into any further."

"Then if you don't know, you suspect." Mary paid no heed to his protestation. "Have you told your mother of this? Is she willing to have you sacrifice yourself?"

"I meant to write her when—if I got safely away," he muttered.

"And break her heart?" Mary's indignant tones were as firm with decision as his had been. "You shall not do this thing. I mean to find Hill if I have to engage detectives—I'll wring the truth out of him—"

"And do me the greatest injury that any one could in this world," he interrupted her. "Greater even than the jury that sent me to prison."

For a long minute there was silence between them while Mary sat with averted eyes, her dazed mind striving to grasp the import of this change of front. He did know or at least suspect the identity of the forger and he was willing, anxious to protect him at the expense of his own vindication—his life itself, if he were discovered

attempting to escape. If Hill were not the forger, he knew who was; why should George Lorrin protect him against his own honor, his mother's relief from the long years of mental torture and disgrace? Surely no friendship was worth such a sacrifice—could it be something more than friendship, more than self, more than filial love?

"Mr. Lorrin," she said gently, "you say that you cannot explain, but will you answer one question? I shall ask nothing more. You say that it would do a great injury to have the truth known. Would it be to you or to some one else?"

"To me through some one else, Miss Mary," he replied. "Through an innocent person who would suffer more than I have, more than I should if I were taken back to-night. I didn't mean to tell you, but I see I must try to make you understand; it's your right, after all you've done to help me."

"And your mother; she is innocent of any wrong. Would this other person's suffering be worse than hers?"

Mary forgot her promise, forgot everything except the dull, hopeless pain that had clutched at her heart. There could be only one person in all the world for whom a man would make such a sacrifice, and she must know.

Lorrin turned and walked to the window, where he stood well back behind the screening curtain which Susan had hung there, his head bowed. Mary thought she saw his shoulders heave once, but when he turned to her again his face bore no trace of emotion.

"If my mother knew of my decision and the motive which actuated it, she would be the first to tell me that I had taken the right course," he said with simple dignity. "Indeed, Miss Mary, I have no other. The innocent person who would suffer most is—very dear to me."

Mechanically, Mary rose from her chair. All sense, all feeling, seemed to have left her except the desire to get away—to fly from his presence. It was ended. There was nothing more to be said. He must make this monstrous sacrifice, and she could only stand aside.

"I understand." Her tone was dull and lifeless. "I didn't before, but it must be as you wish, of course. There remains only to get you away as quickly and far as we can; only—it would be very dreadful, a tragedy, if you might be mistaken, after all. You're very sure this step is necessary?"

"Very sure. I wish with all my soul that there could be a possibility of a mistake, but there isn't." His drawn lips quivered with the tensivity of the white lines about them.

"Does this person who is dear to you know the truth and the stand you have taken?" She lifted her eyes to his, and he shook his head.

"No one must ever know."

"Do you think it is fair to make any one unknowingly accept such a hideous sacrifice?"

"It is the only thing that I can do," he responded quietly. "I have no alternative."

"Then arrangements shall be made for you to go as soon as it is safe." Somehow Mary managed to advance a step or two toward him and hold out her hand. "There is no need in running unnecessary risks, and you may have to be patient for a little while longer; but we shall contrive somehow to get you far away. Susan will come to you in an hour or so."

She felt his hand clasp hers in gratitude, heard his stammered thanks, and then somehow she was alone out in the leafy green of the grove groping blindly as she made her way between the trees, careless for once if she were seen or not. This woman who was dear to him, had she a brother or father who had committed the forgery, in whose stead George Lorrin must continue to suffer in this mad, quixotic idea of self-sacrifice? He and Richard Hill had been at least office acquaintances; had Hill a sister? What difference did it make? How he must love her, this other woman! Would she ever know the greatness of what he had done?

Nils had gone to the greenhouses, and Mary wandered into the house, hearing her mother's voice on the veranda, but encountered no one as she made her way to her

room and flung herself face downward on the bed. The possibility of there being some one he cared for when Mrs. Lorrin first mentioned an errand he had asked her to perform for him came back to Mary now with the knowledge that it had been indeed a premonition.

She had accepted it then as a matter with which she had no right to concern herself, knowing that with his vindication their lives must necessarily lie far apart, for even if he might have cared for her she was irrevocably bound to another man. Now, however, that the woman he held dear must be the unconscious cause of his continuing to bear this burden of shame and disgrace, Mary felt a hot tide of resentment rising within her.

If this unknown were worthy of such love she would not permit this terrible, unjust thing—unjust to her as well as to him. Would his mother, would Mary herself, be right in permitting this sacrifice to be consummated? If they succeeded in obtaining the proof that would clear him, dare they in justice withhold that knowledge from the world?

Mary rose as this thought came to her and paced the floor in an agony of indecision. No attempt to analyze her feelings, no idea of petty jealousy entered her pure, conscientious mind. Was it fair to any one that he should remain under such a cloud for the rest of his life? Her whole spirit revolted against it, and gradually the resolution formed that even against his will, his very knowledge, she must go on with the case.

She would keep her word, and arrange to get him safely away, but she had made no other promise; and wherever he might be, she would keep on working until she learned the truth. He had said that his mother would approve of his course, but Mary determined to take the proof of his innocence to her when she had learned it, and leave it to her to decide. This resolution of George Lorrin's was born of a sick, distorted brain, and he must be saved in spite of himself.

Fired with the strength of her determination, Mary managed to dress and appeared at dinner, flushed and more animated

than she had been for days. She saw the relief in her mother's face, the lines of worry relax on her father's brow, and when after the meal was concluded and the former remarked tentatively that perhaps they might go to the bridge game at the Rathbun's, after all, she saw them off with contrite tenderness. They too had suffered in the mystery she was compelled to maintain, but when it was all over, how she would make it up to them! All her life she would devote to their happiness—that, at least, was left to her.

"Praise the saints!" a voice muttered behind her as she turned from the door to return to the library. "'Tis well they've gone, Miss Mary, for you've another visitor, and if you want me to get rid of him, just say the word!"

"Another visitor, Susan?" Mary asked in surprise, her heart beating rapidly with apprehension. Who else should come to her by stealth?

"Yes, and who but that young man you give the go-by to, that Mr. King!" Susan snorted with indignation. "The imper'ence of him! He's waiting out under the pergola this very minute afther coming to me as bould as a lion, and he says he'll not go till he sees you! I let him see plain he was not wanted around here, but he says you're the best judge of that. Will I call Nils and have him sent about his business?"

"No, Susan." Mary shook her head. "There is something I want to see Mr. King about, and I'm glad he came. You are to say nothing of his visit to any one, of course. I can trust you?"

"I wish you couldn't!" Susan retorted fervently. "He's two-faced, for all his smiling ways, Miss Mary, and I was thinking we was well rid of him. You'll be coming in soon?"

Mary reassured the old nurse's solicitude and went slowly out to the pergola. What could he want of her? Surely their conversation had been final enough that afternoon. As he himself said, they had come to an impasse; what more could be said between them?

At the flutter of her light gown in the fast-deepening dusk a dark figure rose from the seat under the pergola, and she saw

a tiny pinpoint of fire rise in an arc and fall into the dew-laden grass as he flung his cigarette away. The next instant his low voice reached her.

"Mary, I had to come! I couldn't endure it to go back to town and leave matters as they were between us. You asked me to do something this afternoon, and I wanted you to know that I will."

"You mean that you will find Richard Hill?"

She had not offered her hand, and his fell to his side as she passed him and seated herself on the bench.

"Yes. There isn't going to be any more pretense between us, and I'm bound in all fairness to tell you again that I don't believe Dick had anything to do with that forgery, nor even has a suspicion. After you left me I went to the inn at Scarborough, and before I dined I telephoned his wife, under that wretched pseudonym, of course—I had no choice. I assured her he hadn't come to me, and she seems pretty hopeless, poor woman. Seems to think he's gone for good."

"And you still think that doesn't look like guilty knowledge?"

There was a touch of half incredulous scorn in Mary's question, but King replied emphatically:

"I still think it looks as though he were afraid of being dragged into a mess, for her sake. Even though he did me that favor of which I told you, I've got to admit that he hasn't much nerve. A good fellow enough, but a mighty weak, poor-spirited specimen in a showdown. We'll find him, though, and if he should suspect anything we'll get it out of him."

"How do you propose to do it, Wesley?" she queried pointedly. "There are always private detectives—"

"And the authorities," he interrupted her. "I advised his wife to report him without delay to the Bureau of Missing Persons. I can't appear in the matter as his friend, of course, because of that wretched name, but I can get private detectives on the job right away and have them mail their reports to you, if you don't trust me to handle it. I wish you could, Mary—I wish you could forget that false-

hood of mine about seeing old J. W. If you knew how I cared for you, how I longed for our happiness together—"

"Don't, please!" She held up her hand protestingly. "If you are sincere at last, if you really mean to help me, to prove yourself in my eyes, don't speak of the future again until we've accomplished what we set out to do. Mr. Lorrin has changed all at once; he wants the investigation dropped."

"He wants—what?" King cried.

"Hush, Wesley; we must be careful," she warned. "He wants to go away and take his ultimate chances of escape without having the guilty person brought to justice."

"Well, look here, Mary!" King burst out excitedly but in a more guarded tone. "Doesn't that look as if, after all, he committed that forgery?"

"Never!" she exclaimed. "He wants to protect the person who did, for some reason of his own."

There was a pause while King nervously took out his cigarette case and then replaced it in his pocket. After a time he said in a changed tone:

"That's pretty white of him, if it's true; but I cannot imagine his motive. Anyway, we've got to respect it, of course—it's his own affair, and we have no right to interfere further. I'll help him to get out of the country, as I offered before, and that will be the end of it."

"It will be only the beginning," Mary announced firmly. "I'll never rest till I have proved his innocence even in spite of himself. Your principles seem to have changed, Wesley. What about the cause of common justice now?"

"But, my dear girl, the man has a right to choose for himself!" King expostulated. "If he wants the case dropped we mustn't take it upon ourselves to drag it into the limelight."

"I shall leave that to his mother; but I mean to know the truth for myself." There was a note of finality in her tones that King recognized, and he veered suddenly.

"There's no harm in that," he conceded. "You've taken an interest in him from the beginning, and we'll find Hill, anyway, and

hear what he's got to say. You're right about his mother, Mary—I confess I didn't think of her for the moment. I'd like to talk to him, like to find out, if I can, why he's taken this stand, and make arrangements to get him away. He'll never know we're going on with the investigation till we've got all the evidence in hand. Think it's too late to rout him out? It isn't nine yet."

"I don't know that he wants to see you," Mary demurred. "It's all settled, finished, as far as he's concerned."

"But if I'm to help him escape?" King insisted. "You can't manage it by yourself—you and Susan. We'll put him aboard a train together—or a steamer, if he prefers that—and I needn't come here again and annoy you until all our plans are completed."

There was bitterness in his tone, and Mary felt a twinge of compunction.

"It is good of you to do this, Wesley—I don't think I could arrange it all by myself." She arose. "Come, then, but mind he believes only that we are going to accede to his wish and drop all further efforts in his behalf."

They stole down to the studio and up on the porch, but no sound or movement from within greeted the echo of their cautious footsteps, and King knocked softly on the door.

"Hello!" he whispered. "The door's open! It swung inward when I touched it, and there isn't a sign of a light—No, let me go ahead!"

Mary would have passed him, but he barred her way and entered first himself. From the threshold she could hear him fumbling at the table.

"Lamp's not here," he muttered, and as he groped his way to the mantel she waited, her heart fluttering wildly with a nameless fear. Then a match flared up, touched the wick, and the lamp chimney tinkled as King replaced it with a shaking hand. The light flickered and steadied, showing the long, low room to be empty.

"Quick! In there!" Mary pointed to a door at the side. "It's a storeroom. Something may have happened—"

King hurried forward, holding the lamp

aloft, and disappeared into the inner chamber, and as instantly Mary had darted to the table where her quick eyes had discerned a small square of white. Her fingers closed over the envelope, and she thrust it into the bosom of her gown with no need to read its contents.

George Lorrin had gone to take his forlorn chance!

CHAPTER XX.

THE VOICE OF FEAR.

"NO one in there, and only a packing case of books has been rummaged in!" King reëntered the studio and set the lamp on the table, gazing at Mary over its top, the footlight effect giving him weird bluish shadows about his eyes and mouth. "What do you think has become of him, Mary?"

"He's tried to get away without giving us an opportunity to help him any further?" There was desolation in her tone and she was oblivious to King's stare.

"You're sure it's that?" he asked, then added quickly: "My car's just around the turn; perhaps he's taken that?"

"No, he wouldn't." Mary shook her head. "He doesn't want any help from us!"

"Then he's a fool. He'll be taken, sure." King checked himself and then remarked after a pause: "We're doing no good staying here, Mary, with this lamp to draw attention to us. I'd like to find the fellow and give him a lift—do you suppose he's made for the station here, or at Scarborough or Harmon?"

The suggestion roused Mary from the shock of their discovery and she cried:

"No! Put the lamp out and we'll go, but leave the door open. He may come back." She turned toward the porch. "I don't believe Mr. Lorrin would risk a station near here on the main line, but do go and look for him, Wesley. Try the back roads—anywhere. I'll wait out in the garden as long as I can, and if I don't hear from you I'll slip out and telephone you in the morning. Find him. Save him from being caught."

She didn't realize the agony of entreaty that rang in her low, quivering tones, and King extinguished the lamp suddenly as she ceased speaking, then made his way toward her.

"I'll do my best, Mary." He left the door ajar behind them and guided her down the porch steps with a carefully impersonal touch upon her arm. "He must have been beside himself to have gone off like this. There was a covered tray on the floor in the corner, so he must have had his supper; did you notice it? The lamp chimney was cold, though, when I touched it. It'll be sheer luck if I do find him now, but I'll cruise around the roads until dawn, if necessary."

He talked on with a garrulity that betokened some inward excitement which was all at once borne in on Mary's consciousness. Quick tempered and violent as he was, he seemed to be trying to mask some strong emotion that all but consumed him, and she wondered. He had never showed such an interest in George Lorrin before—any interest, in fact, save an antipathy that amounted to actual hatred, and what help he had given had been enforced by her command.

Was he hiding something from her now? Had he seen something back there in the studio that had been hidden from her eyes—in the storeroom, perhaps? Mary halted abruptly at the belt of trees fringing the grove.

"Go on alone, Wesley, we might be seen," she whispered. "You know the way to the side gate and you mustn't lose a minute. When I hear your car start I'll go to the pergola and wait."

"It's a slim chance that you'll hear from me to-night," he responded reluctantly. "Even if I locate Lorrin he mayn't be willing to return and I'll have to take him along with me. Don't wait too late, and be sure you phone me in the morning."

Her renewed distrust had crystallized and she asked breathlessly:

"You do mean to find him if you can, don't you? You're not deceiving me?"

King laughed shortly, and when he spoke there was no tender reassurance for her in his tone, but rather a grim determination.

"I'll find him, Mary. He won't be taken if I can help it. Look here, you're not to make a single move in this matter, nor in trying to locate Hill, either. You'll do more harm than good and only get all of us into trouble. I'll attend to everything, and if you don't believe me at last you're not the little woman I thought you. I'll find George Lorrin."

He turned, diving behind a patch of shrubbery, for the moon had risen, and Mary saw a moving shadow pass through the garden to the side gate.

She stood quite still until faintly from down the road she heard the whir and hum of a motor, then slipped back through the grove to the studio. It had never appeared as desolate and forsaken to her before, and the night breeze in the tall trees mingled eerily with the tinkling rush of the brook in the glen and the mournful hoot of an owl up the hillside beyond.

Shivering in spite of herself Mary crept in and, closing the door carefully, felt her way to the mantel and relighted the lamp with a stray match her fingers encountered there.

Turning with her back to the fireplace she stared about the studio more carefully than before, but George Lorrin had evidently set it in order, for no trace remained of its late occupancy save the covered tray in the corner.

Mary advanced to it and lifted the white cloth; the food beneath it had been left untouched. Sighing, she took up the lamp and went hesitatingly to the storeroom door, half fearful of what she might find there, but it was as Wesley King had said: the lid of one packing case was open, the books scattered about within, but all else was as it had been for long years.

There was no sign of a struggle; George Lorrin had gone of his own accord. Where was he now? Skulking about in the woods somewhere, tramping a lonely road, a fugitive forever from his kind? Why had he not waited at least for aid in order to get safely away? It did not seem like him to leave without a single word of farewell—

But her note! The envelope which she had picked up from the table without time to glance at the superscription, but know-

ing instinctively it was for her. How could she have forgotten it?

Returning to the table Mary placed the lamp on it and then drew the letter from the bosom of her gown. It was blank, but she tore it open with trembling fingers and sank into a chair.

The writing was the same as that when he had signed as a witness at her marriage ceremony, almost the same as that which had appeared in the photograph of the forged check, and she read it with a fast beating heart:

DEAR LADY:

I am going away because I must, before my presence brings further trouble upon you, more than you can know. Please remember what I begged of you, that all investigation be dropped. I will give myself up voluntarily if it is continued, for the truth shall never be known. Please also explain this to your friend who has offered to aid me and tell him that I have sworn this. If I am taken, neither you nor he have ever seen me. If I go free, you will never hear of me again, but if you think of me at all know that I shall always remember you with deepest gratitude and honor as the noblest woman in all the world. May God bless and keep you and bring you happiness.

It was unsigned, and as Mary stared at it her eyes slowly dilated and her face blanched. Again she read it and yet again; then it fluttered to her feet and she started up stifling a wild cry which rose to her lips.

She was "the noblest woman in all the world!" He had gone to save her—her—from further trouble, "more than she could know!" She was to tell her "friend" that George Lorrin had sworn the truth would never be known. He would give himself up first, go back to prison—to keep from suffering some one who was very dear to him!

She was the woman for whom he had made this terrific sacrifice. She was the "noblest in the world," the woman he loved. If knowledge of the identity of the real forger would cause her suffering, it could only be because the criminal was closely connected with her, the man whose name she bore—Wesley King.

She shrank back, cowering from the horror of the thought, but a thousand incidents came flooding back to her brain, con-

firming the truth: Wesley's uncontrollable start when he read the name of their convict witness over the latter's shoulder in the parsonage, his brutally expressed efforts to get rid of him afterward at the earliest opportunity, his rage when she announced her intention of giving the fugitive further help, and obtaining his address. Surely there had been guilt then in his manner if only she might have realized it.

Then their parting. His alternate abuse, insults, threats and pleading with something underlying it all that was not love, not exactly fear, but craft. He had wanted her for his wife, he had tried again and again in their meetings since to persuade her to come to him, but, thank God, he did not love her! She saw that clearly now and in relief at this knowledge she did not yet question his motive in rushing her off her feet, carrying her away on that reckless elopement. It was enough for the moment that no spark of affection bound her to this despicable creature.

There was that dinner under the swaying lanterns at Tommaso's. She had been surprised and shocked at her own cynical indifference to his love making, but his face as she had seen it in all its latent evil had risen before her again as on the night before and she had been undeceived. How careful he had been when she asked him about George Lorrin, how cleverly he had admitted knowing of him and his trial through their mutual association with Mr. Wharton and how he had tried to convince her of Lorrin's guilt. Only when she made an issue of it had he promised to help prove the other man's innocence, and what had he done to keep that promise?

How could she have been so blind as to trust him? Mary covered her face with her hands, feeling a cold chill clutch her, sweep her as with a gale. She had placed George Lorrin in his hands. Even now she had sent him forth to hunt down the one person on earth who could betray him.

The worn latch of the old studio door had slipped and it swung inwardly for an inch or two, but she was oblivious to it. King had not betrayed George Lorrin to the authorities because he was afraid of losing her; that could be the only explanation.

Yet might it not be also that he feared through her instrumentality the case might be reopened and the truth discovered at last? She could well understand his repeated offer to help get the fugitive out of the country; flight would admit the guilt he had always denied, and when King first came there to the studio he had tried with all his plausibility to make George Lorrin see how hopeless his case was. *What had he said to Lorrin alone that night to make him begin to suspect the truth?*

As this thought flashed across her mind Mary dropped her hands and straightened. Then she started, quivering, her eyes fixed wide and dark upon the door, for it was opening slowly, deliberately, a hand clutching the latch and a shoulder silhouetted between moonlight and lamp's glow.

There was something so incredibly stealthy and affrighting about the silent, cautious advent of the intruder that Mary involuntarily opened her lips to scream, but no sound issued from them and she could only wait, tense yet erect, while the door continued to move inch by inch, until after endless ages a face appeared.

Convulsed now with the fear that had been latent in it at their first meeting Mary nevertheless knew it and her own terror fell from her even as the recognition became mutual.

"Come in, Mr. Hill!" she said with a little flutter in her breath. "Did your wife give you my message?"

He nodded sullenly, then leaped in and whipped the door shut behind him, standing with his back to it to stare in abject fear about the studio and then into her face.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper. "I knew when my wife told me about you that you were the girl who came to the office yesterday. I might have been wise then that it was all up."

"You told her after Mrs. Lorrin left last night that you were being framed, but you didn't mean by poor George Lorrin or his friends!" Mary remarked. It seemed to her that miraculously her brain had cleared and was functioning without her volition, as under the spell of another's personality; that the words issuing from her own lips with the calmness of certainty were directed

by something quite apart from her consciousness. "You meant that some one else would frame you if he could in order to save himself now that the truth was coming out. Why didn't you speak first and save yourself from the whole brunt of that forgery? Why did you run away?"

"Because, I was afraid," gasped the visitor. "I've always been afraid of him, he was too slick for me, and I'm afraid now. He isn't here?"

"No." Mary's lip curled. "Did you think I told your wife to send you into a trap?"

He came slowly forward into the full aura of the lamp, a pitiable figure despite his jaunty clothing, his round face sagging and putty-colored, his eyes bloodshot and shifting desperately, his full lips twitching and slaving.

"I didn't know what to think, before God!" he exclaimed. "I'm almost crazy. I came here because it was my last chance. You told my wife you knew I didn't commit that forgery, but the main guy who framed George Lorrin first would try to get me now. You said you'd see it didn't happen if I'd come to you, and that's why I'm here."

"I said I'd see that you weren't unjustly accused, but I can't help you unless you tell me the whole truth," Mary responded. "Sit down here and try to compose yourself. We're quite alone and you needn't be afraid to tell me everything from the beginning. The man who committed that forgery was Wesley King, wasn't he?"

She forced the utterance of the name and in spite of her conviction found herself waiting in forlorn suspense for the answer. If she had been wrong, after all? If George Lorrin might possibly have been mistaken, and the man to whose life she had linked hers were not a criminal?

But if subconsciously that hope had existed, it died quickly for Hill nodded and a visible shudder shook him.

"Yes! I swear I hadn't anything to do with it, I swear I didn't know what he wanted those notes and receipts for. I didn't even guess till it was all over—till Lorrin was pinched, I mean. I suffered hell waiting for the trial for fear some new

evidence would crop up, and right until he was convicted and his appeal denied I didn't dare breathe. King was cool all the way through, nothing fazed him."

Mary choked with contempt for the craven young scoundrel before her who had no thought for the innocent man condemned to a living death and undying disgrace, but the very frankness of his confession showed that he was unconscious of its enormity and she held her resentment carefully in leash.

"Tell me about those notes and receipts. But first, how long had you and Wesley King been friendly? Did you ever open a bank account for him or with him?"

Dick Hill stared.

"Me? I never had a bank account in my life except a tin one and then I used to slide the coins out with a knife-blade! King always seemed to me like a supercilious kind of a duck till one day about eight or nine months before that Lorrin check came up. Lorrin was all right, used to come into the office with his reports and seemed like a good fellow enough; I never had anything against him and I wouldn't have framed him, ever—it was King.

"One day we met going down in the elevator at noon and King asked me out to lunch. He was a swell and I was tickled to death, and after that he began to take an interest in me—not around the office, you understand, but outside, taking me to burlesque shows and suppers and never letting me foot the bills. Great guy to talk to, too; knew a lot about reading character from handwriting and other stuff that I'd thought was all bunk before."

"Character from handwriting?" Mary repeated sharply.

"Sure. That's the way the whole thing came about, Miss Greenough. I fell for that stuff hard and when he asked me to get specimens of handwriting of everybody connected with the office, I did it, like a simp. He was a shark at it, I'll say that for him; read Lamprey and old Norcross and the rest like a book. Lorrin was the only one he couldn't seem to get, and that's why he wanted so many of his signatures on the reports."

He was talking rapidly, eagerly but with a certain monotony as though he had com-

mitted his story to memory, and Mary saw that he was lying but she merely nodded and said:

"Go on."

"Well, it was like this." There was a trace of confusion in Hill's tone now as though something in her gravely judicial manner disconcerted him, and he twirled his hat between nervous fingers. "About seven months before Lorrin was pinched I got in a little trouble over a debt I owed and King advanced the money to get me out of it. 'Course, that cinched him with me and I thought he was the whitest guy I'd ever met. Later, came the showdown about the forged check."

He paused, swallowing hard, and Mary remembered a phase of her conversation with Mr. Wharton on the previous day.

"Mr. Hill!" She sat forward in her chair and fixed his furtively moving eyes with her own steady, clear ones. "I told you I couldn't help you unless you told me everything. Something else occurred in that office about six months before Mr. Lorrin's arrest. What was it?"

"Something else?" he echoed, his hands suddenly tightening on his hat brim. "I don't know—"

"I think you can remember," Mary urged. "You must have heard Mr. Wharton telling me about it yesterday when you were watching me through the glass panel of his office. It was something about a checkbook he'd left open on his desk."

Dick Hill's lips had become stiffened and dry and now he moistened them and nodded jerkily.

"Oh, yes! He'd left a checkbook there when Lorrin was alone in the office. I heard Lorrin say something about it to old Norcross when he left and they both laughed, but I didn't catch what it was. I don't know anything more—"

"Mr. Hill, you're wasting my time and yours," Mary interrupted him with sudden decision. "You do know that a check from that book issued by an obscure bank in which Mr. Wharton kept a minor account was the one used in that forgery later. You know it was missing that day, for it was you who drew Mr. Wharton's attention to the blank stub, and you did it because Wesley

King instructed you to. After you heard Lorrin's remark to Norcross you stole that check and gave it to King."

"I—I—it's a lie!" Hill cried harshly as he rose. "I never—I didn't come here for this."

"Then go," Mary shrugged. "You knew all about that forgery from the beginning; that's why you first procured those signatures from the office. Lorrin was chosen to be the victim and that incident of the neglected checkbook and Lorrin's remark upon it played straight into your hands. You took those signatures and that check; is there anything to show that any one but you was concerned in the forgery?"

"God, that's what I was afraid of," the miserable young man groaned. "That's what King's planning to put over on me. You've got me right, but that's all I did have to do with it. Wesley King wrote the check in old J. W.'s hand, signed his name and then told me how he was going to cash it so that there wouldn't be any question raised in the cashier's mind. I'd never seen that sort of stuff pulled and I thought it was wonderful."

"How did he plan to cash the check?" Mary asked.

"Why, he never forged Lorrin's name on the back of it as endorsement until he got right to the bank, to the cashier's window. Then he pretended to have forgotten and wrote the name right there before the fellow's eyes with his fountain pen. That's why he practiced Lorrin's name so much—to be able to copy it quick, offhand. Luck was with him, though, for that cashier died a month later; he was scared stiff till then, but he came to me and said: 'Dickie, my boy, we're safe. Nothing on earth can point to us now.' Right after that, though, he began to get arrogant, as if I wasn't his kind and he'd only been using me. Little I cared!"

"But—you never once thought of Mr. Lorrin's side of the case." Mary could not keep back the reproach and Hill winced.

"Oh, I did, but not till the time of the trial drew near and then I was worried sick for fear I'd be called as a witness for having shown J. W. where that check was missing that day—I never could have faced

Lorrin, him a prisoner and me— But I wasn't called, though, and ever since he went up I've had spells thinking about him and wishing I hadn't done it, even after I got married and began to live quiet and— and happy. I never thought of any one getting on to the truth."

He dropped into a chair once more, letting his hat fall to bury his face in his hands with his elbows on his knees, and after a moment Mary queried:

"How much did you get of the five thousand?"

"Only five hundred. King promised me a thousand, but he reneged and there wasn't anything I could do. When I read Tuesday morning that Lorrin had escaped, I didn't dare go near King, not until last night, after Mrs. Lorrin had been to my house. Then I went to him and he said the game was up and we'd both have to leave the country; that he'd take a train West to-night and sail for the Orient, and he'd get me a berth on a liner for South America sailing late this afternoon.

"He made me promise not to try to reach my wife to-day, but there was something in his manner I didn't like—didn't trust. Anyway, I couldn't have gone without saying good-bye to her so I sneaked home, and she—she told me about you, and I saw he was going to frame me."

"Why was he known as 'Coyle?'" Mary pursued.

"It was only that once, when I introduced him to my wife; she said she'd told you about it. After he left J. W.'s office I didn't see much of him; he was coming up in the world and somehow I never felt the same with him after that check business. When I told him I was going to be married he warned me never to mention him to my wife under his own name, so when I did talk of him I called him 'Coyle.'

"My wife made me give up running away to-day and got me to come up here to you even though I couldn't tell her everything. I have told you, though; how can you keep King from framing me? I took those signatures and the blank check and gave them to him, and even if it is only his word against mine he could prove a guy guilty of anything, he's so slick. The little

"I've got wouldn't help me against him with any jury."

"Then you have got something against him besides just your word!" Mary leaned forward across the table and something in her tone made Hill glance up quickly. Then he fumbled in his pocket.

"I don't believe much in those handwriting experts, not after Lorrin's trial," he explained. "They couldn't even tell that it wasn't his own endorsement on that check, let alone that it wasn't him imitating old J. W.'s hand on the front of it, signature and all. I couldn't expect them to tell whether it was me or King practicing Lorrin's and J. W.'s names on these pieces of paper, but I kept them just the same!"

He produced a worn, creased envelope from which he took a note and several pieces of a scratch pad and passed them across to Mary. Dazedly she eyed them. The note, addressed unmistakably in Wesley King's hand, was signed by him, addressed to "Dear Dick" and made a trivial engagement for that night, dated more than two years before. The fragments contained mere disconnected scrawls, sometimes a single letter, then two or three joined, then whole signatures, "J. W. Wharton" and "George Lorrin!" The final paper even held a sum of money written out in a straggling imitation of Wharton's hand: "Five Thousand Dollars."

"Where did you get these?" Mary asked. "Have you shown them to any one else?"

"No, Miss Greenough," Hill replied to her last question first. "He used to write them in my room nights when he was practicing up to fix a check and pass it. The note to me is in his natural hand and the rest are half like his and half like old J. W.'s. or Lorrin's. He usually burned the papers he scribbled on, but I managed to get hold of those."

"Why?" Mary replaced them in the envelope. "If you thought you were both safe from discovery, and didn't believe experts could determine whether you or Wesley King had written these, why did you keep them?"

Hill's pasty face reddened and he moved uncomfortably in his chair.

"I thought they might be useful sometime," he blurted out finally. "I knew he was bound to go up in the world, a fellow as clever as him, and I expected he wouldn't do as much for me as he promised. I wouldn't go to Lorrin's people with them because it mightn't have done any good, but if I waited till King got to be a rich man—well, he ought to pay something to get away with a thing like that."

Mary felt a wave of repugnance rising within her at the incipient blackmailer's naïve confession, but she demanded coldly:

"Why didn't you sell them to him last night?"

"I forgot all about them, Mrs Lorrin had given me such a scare about knowing the truth, and I thought then it was her or some people back of her that was going to frame me; I never guessed it was King till I got home this afternoon and my wife told me about your call," he explained. "I thought of those old papers then and made up my mind I'd bring them to you. Do you think they could prove anything?"

"I think an expert could, with them as evidence and your story to back it up. Will you leave them with me?" Mary's voice trembled slightly with suspense, but Dick Hill nodded casually and she thrust the envelope into her gown where George Lorrin's own note to her had rested so short a time before. "Now, will you promise me that you will go straight home to your wife and stay there until you hear from me? You may have to repeat your story in court, but you'll be telling it first."

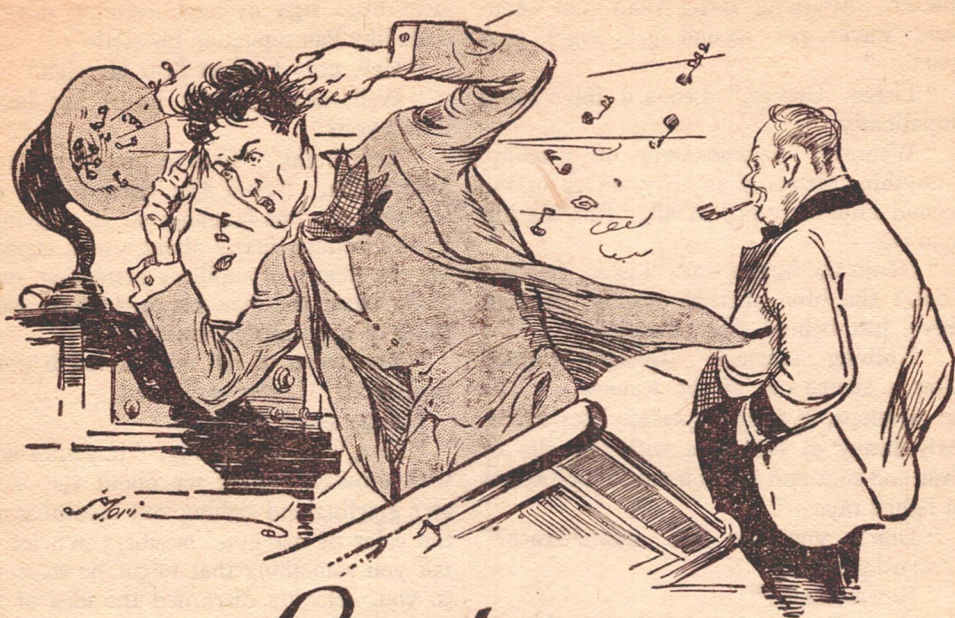
"I understand." He picked up his hat. "State's evidence; I've looked all that up, and I've been running straight ever since. That ought to count. If King don't make his getaway after all, and tries to frame me—"

He paused as a knock sounded upon the door, and gazed at Mary in fear-stricken silence. She waited in outward calmness while the low, insistent knocking continued, but her heart was beating wildly.

Could it be that George Lorrin had come back? Then all at once the voice of Wesley King came to her ears.

"Mary! Are you there?"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



Listen

By JACK BECHDOLT

THE two ladies took their departure after expressing proper appreciation of the tea and the rare privilege of meeting such a celebrity as George Watt, the scientist. Leonard Quimby, who had furnished the tea, the bachelor hospitality, and the famous friend, threw himself into an overstuffed chair. Quimby was tall, long and loose jointed. His legs and arms sprawled over the chair arms in an untidy, dismembered effect. He was ten years younger than George Watt.

"Listen, George!" Leonard exclaimed eagerly. "What 'd you think of her?"

George Watt blinked behind his spectacles. "Her? Who? Which—"

"Who? Why, Beatrice, of course!"

"Is Beatrice the fat one?"

"The fat one! Good heavens! The fat one? Why, that's the mother, you bone-head!"

"Then, Beatrice must be the skinny one," George reasoned placidly.

"She's not *skinny*. Good Lord, listen—"

"Well, underweight, then; malnourished—"

Leonard ran his hands through his hair and groaned. "Listen!"

"I'm listening," George agreed.

"Well, what did you think of her?"

"Who—Beatrice? Why, she's all right."

Leonard mocked him bitterly. "All right, eh? So she's all right. Just like that, *she's all right*. Say, listen—"

"Sure," said George. "She's all right."

Leonard made choking noises. His hands fastened themselves in his hair. He seemed to be trying to dislodge his head from his shoulders.

George Watt wasn't paying any attention. His mind was on another topic, and he began to speak his thoughts. "As I was telling you when we were interrupted by the ladies, Leonard—it was purely a question of finding a substitute for the metal diaphragm used in the commercial instruments. No matter what metal you use, there is too high a percentage of inert

matter. Anything faster than four thousand waves per second gets right past metal—"

"Listen, George," Leonard interrupted impatiently.

"Whereas," George went on placidly, "anything slower than fifty waves to the second fails to record at all. But the human ear—"

"Damn the human ear. Listen, George! Look't the blue of that evening sky out there, just behind that chimney—"

"Nothing unusual," George grunted after a glance out of the window. "The air envelope, in a city especially, is particularly heavy at this time with particles of dust and soot and the consequent refraction of light's rays—"

"Don't you see the resemblance?" Leonard persisted.

"Resemblance?"

"Yes. Doesn't it remind you of anything?"

"It reminds me it's pretty near dinner time, Len—"

"Listen! That blue! Isn't that exactly the shade of the blue in her eyes?"

"Her eyes?" George blinked.

"Yes! Beatrice's eyes."

"How should I know, Len? Well, as I was saying, you can see what a pretty little problem I was up against. It was a question, right off the bat, of finding some *substitute* for the diaphragm Edison developed—something non-metallic and capable—"

Leonard raised his hand. "Hush, George—listen!"

George craned his neck. "What is it?" he whispered hoarsely.

"A strain of music somewhere, just a bar or two. It reminded me so much of her voice. You noticed her voice, didn't you, George?"

George turned snappish. "I don't hear anything that sounds like her voice—or anybody's voice," he said. "I can hear a man yelling strawberries, and a truck back-firing, and the 'L' trains down in the next block—"

"Perhaps it was only imagination," Leonard murmured. "Her voice haunts me often when I sit here alone. Did you hear her sigh, George, that funny, whim-

sical little sigh of hers, running down a scale like Pan piping on his reeds—"

"Hell, no! I didn't hear her sigh."

"Well, anyway, you heard her laugh, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did." George turned red with indignation. "And I'm darned if I can see what she was laughing at. To my mind there's nothing funny about a man explaining the theory of capillary attraction, especially when the man happens to be something of an accepted authority."

"You mean to tell me her laugh didn't thrill you!" Lester exclaimed.

George shook his head.

"Now," he said firmly, "if you're done with cross-examining me about this woman's giggling and sighing and breathing and the color of her eyes, maybe you'll let me tell you something that might be some use to you. Having discarded the idea of the metal diaphragm completely, I began scouting around in the newer field of electric currents in the hope of finding—"

"I beg your pardon, George," Leonard broke in earnestly. "Just hush a minute, will you?"

George swallowed his indignation. "Well, what now?"

"I heard a footfall upon the stair—"

"I hear it—"

Leonard shook his head slowly, his animation dying out. "I thought for just a second it was hers! But I'd know her step in a million. It's kind of different—sounds like music—"

"Sounds like music!" George echoed. He took off his spectacles, polished them, replaced them, and looked at Leonard long and earnestly. "Say, how long has this been going on?" he snorted.

"What, George?"

"This hearing things. This sitting around and hearing things that don't happen—like this woman's voice and her laugh and her footfall—"

"Huh? Oh, I don't know—"

George grasped his friend and shook him. "Leonard, answer me. What's your sales' record for this last month?"

Leonard stared at him dreamily. His mind was on something else—that was plain to see. He bent his head as if to listen

better and smiled fatuously. George's mauling brought him to with a start.

"Huh?" he repeated. "Business? Oh, damn business!"

George stared at him in a stunned sort of way. George's mouth hung open. He shook his head slowly from side to side.

Leonard sprang to his feet, pacing up and down the room, his long arms waving disjointedly.

"Damn business!" he repeated brazenly. "Damn everything! Beatrice—that's all I'm interested in." He walked on. "Everything I see reminds me of Beatrice!" he declared. "Everything I hear! Why, George, listen—I can sit here all alone and recall every word she ever said to me. I can sit here all evening and hear her talk, as if she was in the room beside me—"

George groaned.

"I can hear her sigh," Leonard proclaimed brazenly. "I can hear her laugh. I can hear every soft breath she draws. George, I can hear the very beating of her heart."

"My God!" George said solemnly.

Leonard waved his long arms like a windmill.

"What's business, what's money grubbing, compared to happiness like mine?" he declaimed. "What's fame? What's anything compared to the sigh of a beautiful woman? Compared to the music of her laugh? Compared to the music of her lips murmuring your own name?"

"Leonard, are you—are you in love with this girl?" George's manner and voice were tragic.

"Am I?" Leonard shouted. "Listen! I'll tell everybody I'm in love with her! You bet I'm in love with her! Now, what are you going to do about it, eh? I guess it's nothing to be ashamed of, is it, George? No! I'm in love with her! Well! Well, what are you looking like that for? Can't you say something?"

George Watt listened, aghast.

George was a confirmed bachelor.

Women, in his opinion, were a relic of man's evolution from the tadpole, an encumbrance which the human race would rid itself of in its further progress—a fifth

wheel dragging against the onward journey of the chariot of civilization.

Women were like barnacles, drifting about with every tide until chance brought them against some man. Then they would stick like grim death. And everybody knows what a barnacle does to sound timber. Well, the barnacles weren't going to get his friend Leonard!

George laid his hand on Leonard's shoulder.

"That stuff is all the bunk," he said.

"What's the bunk?"

"This love business. There isn't any such thing."

"The devil there isn't! Listen—"

"No. It's nothing but a delusion. A mental disturbance. A disease."

"See here, do I understand you to call Beatrice a disease?"

"Certainly she's a disease!" Leonard struggled, but George held him sternly. "Look what's happened to you. You're sallow, listless, off your feed. You neglect your business. You fly into fits of murderous passion. Then you mope. And you keep hearing things that ain't. If that isn't a disease, what is? It's just like sunstroke, only easier to cure—"

"I don't want to be cured—"

"Why, Len, I'll fix you up in a minute!"

Leonard glared. "George," he said thickly, "listen! You make one more crack like that, and I'll forget we've been friends for twenty years and paste you right on the nose. I mean it!"

George saw he must use more tact. The patient must be humored. He changed his attitude, though his purpose remained grimly inflexible.

"It's all right, old man," he said, throwing his arm over Leonard's shoulder. "There, just sit down and take it easy. Relax. Take a few deep, long breaths—"

"Well, you lay off that stuff about disease, then," Leonard grumbled. "Just because you're all dried up and ready to blow away—"

"Sure," George agreed soothingly.

"You look at everything through a microscope. All you can see is germs and chemicals—"

"Everything's going to be *all right*, Len!"

"You poor crab! You keep your nose down and you never did look a pretty girl in the face or hear the music of a woman's voice. Hush! Can't you hear her voice? Can't you hear her saying 'I think rubber overshoes are utterly fantastic'! Wasn't that *music* the way she said that?"

"Very pretty," George agreed craftily.

"And the way she said to you, 'Isn't science just too funny for words?' Remember that?"

"I do," George growled, bristling at the recollection. "I can hear her say that all right! Now, Len, you and I are going on a little trip. Out to my place in the country. Where it's nice and quiet. Where the air is fresh and you can have lots of milk to drink—and eggs—and new butter—"

"No!"

"Easy, old man! It won't take an hour. Just a nice little ride on the train—"

"I'm going to stay right here in town, I tell you!"

"Just over the week-end," George soothed.

"Uh-uh! I've got to stay near her, George. Maybe I'll see her again—"

"But she said she was going to Atlantic City."

"Well, I thought of running down there to-morrow—"

"Lord, no!" George advised hurriedly. "You can't do that!"

"You don't think so?"

"Wouldn't do at all, Len!" George grew crafty. "Give her a chance to think about you. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, you know."

"I'd rather just sit here and listen to her voice. Just sit and remember the music of her laugh and her sigh, her—"

"You can do that a lot better in the country, Leonard. Sure! There won't be so many trucks going by the house—and peddlers selling fish and strawberries. Won't that be a lot nicer?"

"Well—maybe," Leonard admitted grudgingly.

George clapped his hands like a pleased nursemaid. "Atta boy! Sure! It's go-

ing to be nice—you'll see. Get your bag packed, Len. We're going right up to the station in a taxi. Everything's going to be fine! You'll be surprised!"

Leonard turned reluctantly to give orders to his Japanese boy. Left alone for the moment, George took out a large white handkerchief and wiped his wet brow. His hand shook as he did it.

He sighed tremulously and, throwing himself into a chair, concentrated his frowning attention on nothing in particular while he thought out what he must do next.

This was ghastly. Poor Leonard!

II.

GEORGE WATT's place was a mile and a half from the station. It was a comfortable, big old house, in a big old yard, back off the road. The place was so quiet you could hear the sun rise.

George carried on his work of scientific research in a big laboratory adjoining the house. All the next day he kept himself locked in there, after giving his housekeeper strict orders not to let Leonard out of sight. He joined his friend in the big library after dinner.

"Well," George said, rubbing his hands and smiling like a doctor about to operate, "how are we feeling now? Have a nice, quiet day?"

Leonard sighed deeply.

"A wonderful day!" he murmured. "I lay under a tree in the orchard all day long, just listening to—you know—"

"Could you hear her all right?"

"George, it's marvelous! Seemed as if she was talking right in my ear! Every word she ever said to me repeated itself. It was like a—a concert—sacred music!"

"Think of that!" George murmured, affecting great surprise.

"Yes, sir! Every word. And her little laugh! I could hear that, especially the way she told you, 'Isn't science just too funny?' You remember how she said that—"

"I do, Leonard!"

"You know, I had my arms around her once, George—we were dancing our first

dance—and she gave a funny little sigh. Seemed to-day as if I could hear that sigh repeated over and over—and her breathing—and the soft beating of her heart. Music, I tell you!”

George nodded.

“Well, it’s a miracle, I tell you, George! I never was so happy in my life—and yet kind of unhappy, too! What the devil do I care for making money or a reputation! Hell! Why, George, listen, I’d rather just lie under a tree as I did all day long and hear the music of a woman’s presence than be the top notch rubber goods salesman of the world! I’m telling you!”

George nodded again. There was a crafty twinkle in George’s eye. He had spent the day laboring in his friend’s behalf. He reckoned that he had not labored in vain.

“To the scientific mind, talk like that sounds amusing, Len. All this fuss and bother and loss of time and health about one particular woman. Why, do you know, human beings are nothing but machines. A man—a woman—nothing but a piece of machinery—”

“So you say!”

“And a cheap machine, too! The cheapest in the market. I can go to a corner drug store, and for ninety-eight cents retail price, I can buy the handful of lime and salts and fats that make up a human being. That and a few pails of water—”

“Listen, you can’t put it together and make a wonderful woman of it—a woman like Beatrice!”

“Science will find a way,” George declared stoutly. “We’re pretty close on the heels of even that secret—”

“If you ever do, she won’t have a soul! She will never inspire love.”

“Love! Why, that’s nothing but a—”

“Lay off that! I know what it is and you don’t! If you haven’t got anything better to talk about I’d rather just sit here quiet and think about the music of her voice—”

“Try some real music,” George suggested quickly. He went to a large radio panel in the corner and began adjusting dials.

The still room filled with the singing of violin strings awakened by a master’s bow.

It was like some angelic voice with a range beyond any human voice, deep, rich chords that made the heart strings vibrate; thin, melting harmony that blended with the rarified air of heaven.

“Heifetz, playing in the auditorium in San Francisco,” George said softly, when it had ended. “Now, wait. Hoffmann’s at Carnegie to-night. Let’s get that!”

The notes of a piano grew upon the air and held them in a spell. Tenderly, whimsically, alternating with sudden bursts of brilliancy and fireworks, the master’s fingers wove a magic tapestry out of nothing, enchanting the ear until all the senses swam in sympathy.

George questioned the blue ether again. They heard Homer singing in Detroit; a Damrosch symphony from Chicago.

The dull, quiet room, drowsing in summer dusk, was flooded with music as with many colored lights that painted a vast, bewildering canvas of man and his emotions, his aspirations, his tragedy.

George, the hard-headed scientist, melted.

“That’s what I call music!” he declared with shaky emphasis when the last golden note of Homer’s voice had passed into history.

Leonard did not answer.

“Look here,” George argued, “you mean to say you don’t appreciate real music?”

“Sure, George. It’s nice—”

“Nice! My God—”

“Listen, I’d rather hear the heart beat of the woman I love, hear her voice and her laugh, hear her funny little sigh than all the music in the world. It’s just the imitation. A woman—any woman—just a woman *living* is finer harmony than all that stuff you can squeeze out of the air.”

George rose and went to the radio. “All right,” he snapped. “Listen!”

Leonard leaned forward suddenly, his face coming into the circle of light cast by the shaded library lamp. His features were screwed into a look of comical repugnance.

“What the devil’s that,” he shouted, “the town pumping works?”

The room had filled with a sound very much, as Leonard said, like the working of a giant pump—a pump that wheezed

dolefully. Through its slow, rhythmic beat ran an undercurrent of chuckling, snoring, wheezing noises that made a grotesque accompaniment. One could fancy the high-pitched drone of a sawmill, the progress of a gale of wind through wheat field, the rasp of rusted old nails being drawn hastily from stout oak planks.

It was a sour symphony, a gargantuan practical joke.

"George!" Leonard gasped. "George, listen—"

"Listen yourself!" George roared. "Enjoy yourself! That's the soft, perfumed breath of love. That's a woman breathing, relayed to human ears by microphone."

His sentence was drowned out as the tidal wave of sound swelled with horrid chucklings and raspings as though some volcano stirred its molten lava and gathered up its floods from the innermost caverns of the earth. The accumulation burst with a roar that shook the room, burst as a great wave bursts over the reef, dissolving its accumulated tons in spindrift.

George cupped his hand and roared close to Leonard's ear, "She sighed! Look out, she's doing it again!"

A succeeding wave was gathering, accompanied by that same weird whistling and clucking, that blowing of tempest winds through subterranean depths, sweeping on to overwhelm them.

Leonard leaped to his feet, and would have run, but his friend held him fast while the sound burst upon them.

"George, turn that damned thing off!"

"Sit down," George roared, thrusting his patient into the chair. "Listen to the music! You asked for it!"

From the wide lip of the radio horn came a discordance sour as lemon juice. Less in volume than the roaring breath they had heard, it made up in quality—a quality that made the flesh crawl. A raucous skreaking, like finger nails drawn across dry glass; like an unskilled hand wielding a fiddle bow and torturing strings of cat-gut.

"It's only the silken whisper of a woman's hair," George gloated. "Listen, you love-sick idiot—"

There came a rasp as of gigantic sheets

of silk ripping asunder; as if some giant hand had torn down the canopy of heaven and was rending it to bits.

"Merely a rosy finger tip caressing her velvet cheek," George grinned fiendishly. "We're all machines, I tell you, cheap machines. That's the sacred concert you've been talking about—we all sound like that—when you can hear us working—"

"George, you're a damn liar. That stuff—"

George gestured for silence, for the whole house began to shake with the swift, measured rhythm of a titanic steam engine driving, driving ceaselessly. Boom-boom-boom, boom-boom-boom, boom-boom, the thing hammered on until their senses reeled with its terrifying, ceaseless energy. It was a cannonade, the rending of mountains, the breaking up of the ancient earth.

"A woman's heart!" George roared. "Her heart that beats for you!"

The devil's chorus rolled over them. The two men groped in a chaos of sound that numbed all other senses and bore them down. The beat of the working heart rolled like thunderclaps among the high peaks, the scream of the wheezing lungs rode the gale like Valkyries, the rasp of skin, the skreak of hair against hair, the bang-bang of a footfall—all these and an indescribable medley more than made up a demon's chorus that brought Leonard Quimby struggling to his feet, fighting off his friend.

"That's the symphony you asked for," George was yelling, his face red with the effort to make himself heard. "That's the sacred concert of a woman's sighs, her heart beats, her footfall, the silken rustle of her hair. That's what the cheap machine sounds like when you can hear it."

George broke off aghast.

A mighty steam whistle seemed to be blowing the noon hour for a boiler factory manned by giants.

But instead of one sustained, hoarse, awful note the whistle sang!

If the steam calliope at the tail end of a circus parade were magnified a thousand times and began to sing a love song in a cottage parlor, it would sound faintly like what they heard.

Leonard Quimby's mouth was open, and doubtless he was shouting his horror, for his eyes bulged and he was shaking like a frightened horse.

George sprang at the radio panel and silenced the uproar.

"It's all right," he explained as he twirled the dials. "Just exactly what I told you, nothing more. Merely the accurate record of a woman's heart beat, her breathing, her sighs, her singing—all transmitted by the new microphone I perfected, and amplified by my radio.

"Don't let it scare you, Len. I was only demonstrating what you call music. And now, perhaps—"

With the last words George turned and gaped at an empty room. Leonard Quimby had fled.

George searched the house in vain.

Later he searched the countryside. He did not find Leonard.

The microphone had done its deadly work all too well. George's latest invention, capable of magnifying the minute tinkle of a falling pin until it resounded like the clang of a crowbar, had caught all the sound of the working machinery of a human body with a faithfulness that was fiendish, amplified ten thousand times.

The soft breathing, the sentimental sighing of the subject George had concealed for the purpose in his laboratory, magnified by science, had blown the wits clean out of Leonard's head.

He went through the open window with the last sustained high note of song. He lit running, and remained in that posture while he covered a good half mile of the road leading to the railway station. The rest of the distance he did as fast as his trembling legs would let him. Somehow he got on a train, somehow got back to his apartment, and there collapsed.

It was Taka, his Japanese boy, who got in a doctor and next day sent word to the woman whose name Leonard constantly repeated in his delirium.

When Leonard regained his senses he found Beatrice sitting by him. He shrank away from her timidly.

"Hush," she smiled, finger to lips, "the doctor says you mustn't talk!"

She bent closer. Leonard's eyes grew glassy with fear. He tried to slip from her. Beatrice caught him in her strong young arms.

Leonard pressed his fingers tightly against his ears. He was trembling pitifully.

"It's all right, dear," Beatrice kept repeating. "Everything is all right. Leonard! Listen! Take your fingers out of your ears. Leonard, I want to tell you something!"

Gently she persisted until she got one ear uncovered. She bent her lips close to whisper.

With a convulsive bound the patient wriggled from her arms. There was a whirl of sheets and Leonard was out of the other side of the bed.

Beatrice's scream brought doctor and nurse running. They found Leonard huddled in a corner under the bed, a blanket wrapped about his head. With infinite gentleness they coaxed him out and got him under covers.

The physician, a famous specialist in such matters, divined his trouble. He sent out and bought for his charge a pair of ear muffs. With these strapped firmly in place Leonard ceased to struggle. Soon he drifted into deep sleep.

He woke to find Beatrice still at her post.

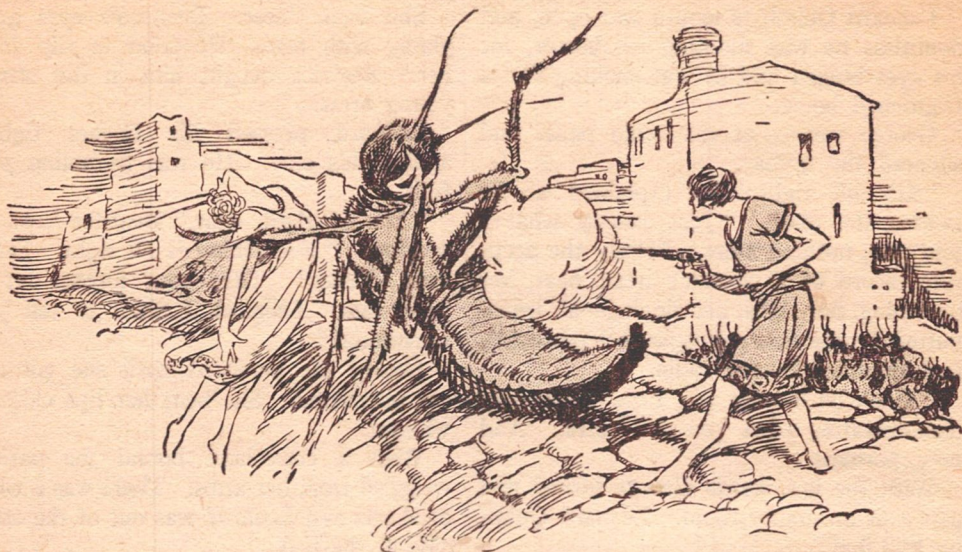
The girl held a slate in her lap. When she saw that Leonard was normal, she penciled a message across it, printing it out in large letters, a blush mantling her cheek as she worked. She held the slate up for Leonard to see. It said:

**LEONARD, I
LOVE
YOU**

In time Leonard Quimby removed the ear muffs. Holding the hand of his fiancée he lay speechless for many hours. By gradual degrees he consented to hear her speak.

When George Watt called next day, Beatrice was holding him close in her arms and whispering words of comfort.

"Darling," Leonard cried ecstatically, "I can hear the beating of your heart!"



The Radio Man

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

CHAPTER XIV.

IN DISGRACE.

I AWAKENED to find myself lying bound in a wood. The time was apparently the next morning. My first thought was to worry about Lilla. My next was to wonder who was to blame for my seizure. Yuri, undoubtedly.

But, if so, had he not misplayed? Left alone, I should by this time be marrying the Sarkari Bthuh; and, once married to her, I could no longer interfere between Yuri and Lilla, who might even consent to marry the prince out of pique. But now Yuri had inadvertently prevented the one event which would have freed him from me forever. Evidently, he had not heard of my betrothal to Bthuh. If I only knew that Lilla was safe, I could regard my present captivity as a stroke of luck.

My thoughts were interrupted by the return of my captor, who proved to be an ant-man, numbered 356-1-400. He was a

young ant, and bore no duel numbers. I started to speak, but he warned me to be silent; to make sure of my obedience, he bit me savagely. Once more, as on my first day on this planet, I experienced intense pain, followed by oblivion, and then by conscious paralysis.

When I awoke, I found that my captor was carrying me. The fact that he was an ant-man confirmed my suspicions of Yuri; but the fact that he was carrying me furtively through the woods, instead of on the main highway, convinced me that I was still in Cupia.

My bonds were still on, but had become very loose. Immediately I decided that my one chance of escape lay in concealing my recovery from the paralysis, when this recovery should occur. So I awaited my opportunity.

Thus we proceeded for about a parth and a half, when suddenly my captor halted and pricked up his antennae. I too listened. Directly ahead of us there came a long-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 28.

drawn howl, the call of a woofus. Nearer came the sound.

We were in a field at the time, and I could see that the ant-man was looking around for a likely tree, in which to take refuge; but the bordering woods were all scrub, with not a single sizable tree in sight, so my captor laid me down and advanced toward the oncoming woofus, evidently determined to bluff it out and to attack before being attacked.

Then the purple terror bounded into the open. One ant-man is no match for a woofus. I admired the bravery of my captor, but he was slowly driven back, contesting every parastad of the way. When the two were nearly upon me, I realized that my languor was gone. I undid my bonds. I stood erect. I hunted for and found a heavy stick.

My captor was entirely engrossed in his conflict. Now was my chance to crush him with my club, and then escape while the woofus devoured his remains. Fate was indeed kind to me once more. So I crept stealthily forward, and then brought my club down with a crash on the head of—

The woofus. For my sense of fair play, my sporting sense if you will, had abruptly changed my mind, and I had rescued the under-dog, instead of killing him. Now I was again his captive, undoubtedly destined this time to have eggs laid in me by Queen Formis.

The ant-man stood for a moment astounded, and then wheeled around. I still held my club. There was now no reason why I should not kill him too, if I could. But he did not charge.

Instead he said: "Let us not fight. You have saved my life, and so I owe you yours. 'A life for a life,' No one shall ever say that 356-1-400 is ungrateful. Go in peace. Look, a mist approaches. My excuse shall be that I lost you in the fog. If you too are grateful, you will tell the same story."

Then the fog, a frequent phenomenon of Poros, closed upon me, and I saw my captor no more. I lay down, covered myself with tartan leaves to keep off the wet, and waited for the fog to lift.

And the next thing I knew, it was morning.

In spite of my long fast—since supper two days ago—I felt refreshed by my sleep, and at once set out through the woods in as nearly a straight line as I could, in the hope of striking a road. The straight line was easy, as the eastern sky was still faintly pink; and likewise it was easy to head north along the road, when I finally reached one. But when at last I came to a city, it turned out to be Ktuth rather than Kuana.

Before seeking food or anything else, except a much-needed drink of water, I found a pinqui and asked him if he had heard any recent news from Kuana, relative to the disappearance of the princess.

"News from Kuana? Disappearance?" he repeated in surprise, "sure, and the princess has been here safe and sound for two days, and left only a few paraparths ago by the Kuana road!"

So I had just missed her! If I had entered the city a bit later, I should have passed her on the road!

My tickets were not sufficient to hire a kerkool; and besides, now that I knew Lilla was safe, I was in no hurry to face Bthuh, whom I had left waiting at the joining-stand, as it were. So, after breakfasting, I set out on foot for Kuana, thirty stads away, carrying with me some lunch.

Around noon, when I had just consumed my lunch on a stone by the side of the road, a kerkool passed me, headed for Kuana. I hailed its single occupant, and was given a lift the rest of the way. He turned out to be the chief pinquis of Kthuh, bound for a conference with the mango of Kuana; and I welcomed the chance to get inside the Kuana jail, face to face with my old friend Poblath, for this opportunity would enable me to give him my long-deferred explanation of my relations—or, rather lack of relations—with his Bthuh.

It was three days since I had shaved, and I must have presented an uncanny sight. In fact, the chief had intimated as much, as I got aboard his kerkool. So, when Poblath saw me, his jaw dropped, and he seemed convulsed with fear.

"Go away, dead man," he begged. "I confess it all. I did hire the ant-man to assassinate you. But, now that you have

my confession, return in peace to the land beneath the boiling seas, and leave me alone!"

So *that* was why I had been kidnaped! Well, at least it let Yuri out of being an absolute fool.

"Poblath, old friend," I replied, "I am not dead. The ant-man lost me in the fog. And I have returned, not to curse you, but rather to thank you, for you have saved me from an unwished marriage."

And then I got across the explanation, which he had so long denied me. When I had finished, there was no longer any doubt in Poblath's mind that I was still his friend; and he warmly patted my jaw, the conventional Porovian token of friendship.

But I fancied that his late sweetheart, Bthuh, would not be so easy to appease.

From the jail I went to my rooms for a shave and a clean toga, and then repaired to the garage where I had rented the kerkool, my intention being to try and arrange to pay for the loss on the installment plan. Just think, the money which it would cost me might just as well be going to buy a new car instead of paying damages for a lost one.

But, to my surprise, the kerkooloolo informed me that my kerkool had been found, with its gyros still running, standing beside the wrecked ant-car, and had been brought back to Kuana intact, so that all I owed was an extra day's rent, for which he would gladly trust me until next ticket-day.

On returning again to my rooms, I found a messenger with a peremptory summons to attend the king forthwith, in spite of the fact that it was now nearly time for the evening meal. Evidently, old Kew had heard of my return.

He had! When I entered the audience chamber, I entered the presence of an awful wrath. Kew was seated on his royal couch, and standing beside him was a she-woofus named Bthuh. Never before had I so stirred a woman's rage, and I hope never to do so again.

The king demanded an explanation, which I gave readily enough, but which did not convince him in the least.

"Cabot Bar-sarkar," he spoke, "I do not believe you. Concern for the safety of

the princess is very commendable. But, if it were that which actuated you, you would have inquired first from me, and would have learned that she had left a note with me, giving word of her departure for Ktuth.

"No, you took the absence of the princess as a mere convenient excuse to desert your bride at the joining-stand, unmindful of the high honor which I was conferring on you in giving the hand of a sarkari to you, lately a commoner, nay, even a beast from another world. Whether or not she will still have you, is for the lady to say; but, as for me, you have greatly incurred the royal displeasure, and I am almost minded to revoke your rank. You came to us from among those accursed Formians, under whose thralldom I am chaffing. Verily, I believe the ancient proverb: 'No good cometh out of Formia.' Go! I have spoken."

"But I have not spoken," interjected Bthuh, ever the disrespectful. "Know, base earth-thing, that no one can injure the pride of Bthuh with impunity. You, who could have given me your love, or even merely your hand, and have received in return a love, the passion of which is unequaled on this planet; chose instead to mete out to me, who am your social superior, the worst insult which a man can give to a woman.

"I condescend to link myself with a commoner, and for reward am treated as dirt, am ground under heel like a brink. Never can you wipe out this insult. Never shall I reconsider my present determination not to marry you."

"For this relief, much thanks," said I to myself.

"But you still have me to cope with," she continued, "you brink! Mathlab! Earth-man!"

A particularly delicate touch, putting "earth-man" as the climax of a list of distasteful creatures!

"Bthuh will have her revenge," she concluded; "never fear. Now I have spoken."

I drew a long breath, as one who has just finished receiving a flogging. So *that* was over.—The lady is now a very good friend of mine, and begs me to tone down this transcription of her tirade. But why not tell the story just as it happened?

As I respectfully withdrew from the audience chamber, an attendant softly radiated into my antennae that the princess desired to see me at once in her apartments. More trouble!

But I was wrong, for Lilla received me most tenderly and graciously. Supper was laid for two.

"Oh, Cabot, Cabot," said she, "how can I ever forgive myself for mistrusting you? I have just listened-in on the explanation which you gave to my father, the king, and of course, I do not believe it, any more than he. But this very disbelief makes me glad. You do love me. You love me enough to incur the royal wrath. And now the sarkari can never get you."

And in an instant she was clasped tightly in my arms, pressing hot kisses on my love-starved lips.

At last we seated ourselves side by side on a couch by the table, and the meal was served. Lilla then explained to me her movements on my wedding eve.

"I was unable to bear your marriage to another," said she, "especially as you did not seem to be trying to do anything about it."

"But how can a mathlab struggle in the jaws of a woofus?" I interjected, quoting one of Poblath's proverbs.

Lilla smiled indulgently, and continued her story. "There was no one here whom I could trust, so I finally called upon Doggo. He met me on the outskirts of the city, and carried me to Ktuth in his kerkool; then returned to Kuana, to try and devise with you some means of escaping from Bthuh. But his kerkool broke down when almost at his destination, thus necessitating his continuing on foot; and, by the time that he reached the city, you had disappeared. When you failed to show up for the wedding, Bthuh acted like one drunk with saffra-root, and has continued so ever since. Doggo sent word to me at Ktuth, and I returned."

Then I told her of my adventures, she sympathizing tenderly with my misfortunes, and thrilling at the conquest of the woofus.

"Now that Poblath is our friend again, we have little to fear from Bthuh," she said. "Bthuh is a mad little wanton, and

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will cool off if let alone. But Poblath, for all his philosophy, is a commoner, and so was to have been expected to misunderstand the situation."

I wanted to say that Lilla herself had entertained exactly the same misunderstanding as Poblath, but instead I merely remarked: "I too am a commoner, Lilla dearest."

"You are not!" she replied, "you are a bar-sarkar, and have the heart of a king. Could the Princess Lilla love a commoner?"

"The Princess Lilla once spent a whole night in the arms of a commoner," I remonstrated.

"And was just as safe and free from insult as she would have been in the arms of her mother," she added. "But Yuri believed otherwise, or said that he did; and threatened that, unless I would by my silence assent to his version of my rescue, he would tell the king, who would have believed the worst and would have cast me out. So, as long as I thought that you were hopelessly doomed, I held my peace. But I was very sad."

Never before had Lilla offered an explanation of Yuri's hold upon her; and I, respecting her privacy, had not intruded. But I was glad to know. Oh, what a cad her cousin was! Atavism! Thus cropped out among the truly regal present rulers of Cupia, the strain of the first pro-ant king. I itched to get my fingers on the renegade.

After the meal, Lilla and I sat for a long time together on her little balcony, pledging an undying love.

"I shall marry you," assented my princess, "even if we have to flee together to islands beyond the boiling seas."

That was all very well, but quite impractical. The boiling seas were impassable, unapproachable even. Formia was barred to us by my criminal record and by the presence and influence there of Yuri. Cupia was barred to us by the wrath of King Kew, due to my treatment of his favorite. And Formia and Cupia made up the entire world. A flight in disguise was impossible, because of my earthborn deformities.

So, although I gloried in Lilla's love,

my joy was sobered by a realization that marriage between us was impossible.

And what about the situation when King Kew should die, and Prince Yuri should succeed to the crown. We had that to look forward to.

CHAPTER XV.

A NEW GAME.

BUT with Lilla's love and trust, I could not despair. As I kissed her good night, with her warm throbbing girlish body held fast in my arms, a single star shone down upon us for an instant, through a rift in the circumambient clouds. Was it my own planet, the earth, I wondered, shining to bless its absent son on his love quest in the skies?

During the succeeding days I saw much of Lilla and nothing of Bthuh. And ever I racked my brains for an idea which should point the way out of my difficulties. My only hope was to perform such a distinguished service for my country that the king would relent, would forgive me, and would promote me to the rank of sarkar.

The most distinguished service which a Cupian can render is to invent a new and popular game, so I set about to do something in that line. And at last the idea came, a whiz of an idea! As Hah Babbuh, head of the Department of Mechanics, had advised me to seek this means of distinction, so it was to him that I first confided my plans.

The game would be very expensive, which was one point in its favor, strange as this may seem. But the necessary apparatus would require great mechanical skill to produce, and lay in a field of machinery in which I was little versed. Accordingly, Hah made an appropriation for the necessary experiments, and advised complete secrecy.

At my request, Prince Toron, who had aided me so efficiently in devising my radio set in the laboratories of Mooni, was detailed to assist me in this new endeavor. He and a young draftsman and a young chemist set to work with me to build the new game.

And what was this new game? It was

archery; target shooting with army rifles, to be more exact. Explosives were already known on Poros, being used for blasting and for airplane bombs. With the aid of the young chemist, I adapted these explosives to be sufficiently slow burning to drive a rifle bullet without injuring the gun. The draftsman and Toron designed the mechanism of the piece. Of course Toron wanted to ring in some electrical features, but I finally persuaded him that this was unnecessary.

In a surprisingly short time we had turned out a crude rifle that would actually shoot. The heads of the Mathematics and Astronomy Departments, Ja Babbuh and Buh Tedn, were then let into the secret, for the purpose of computing trajectories and designing the sights and wind leaf, which they did by an adaptation of the principles employed in computing the orbits of celestial bodies.

A hundred and forty-seven rifles were then turned out and presented to my athletic club, which I had sadly neglected since my admission to membership. Toron's electrical propensities were assuaged by the design of an electrical recording and signaling device at the targets.

My club tried out the rifles; and, when at last they began to get bull's-eyes, they went wild over the new sport. The king heard, and relented sufficiently to send for me and compliment me.

"Myles Cabot," said he, "you are a man of ingenuity, and could have distinguished yourself greatly in useful lines in the good old days before the accursed Formians conquered our fair planet. But now my poor people, emasculated by peace, care only for games; and so the path to glory now lies only through devising means for diverting them."

He sighed, and I pitied the poor old king and his unfulfilled and apparently unfulfillable ambition to rid his people of Formian domination. Would that he could, in return, pity my unfulfilled ambition to be made a sarkar! But I was still far from a promotion, for the king was much too fond of Bthuh, whom I had wronged.

After being thoroughly tried out in my hundred, rifle shooting was next introduced

into the clubs to which my three assistants belonged, and became popular there, as well. The idea spread like wildfire, and soon all the clubs throughout the kingdom were clamoring for guns. The mechanical laboratory at Kuana was made over into a huge arsenal, and the chemical laboratory into a huge munition factory, while the athletic clubs of Kuana and the vicinity detailed some of their members to work overtime in my two plants. Cupians will always work overtime in the cause of play.

Target practice soon became the national sport of Cupia. The craze even reached such dimensions that Queen Formis finally dispatched a special mission to Kuana to study the movement and report whether it could not be put to some practical use. The report of that mission is now one of my most treasured possessions, and a framed reproduction of their conclusions now hangs upon my office wall.

The ant mission concluded, and so reported to their queen, that the new game had absolutely no practical application, but that if it kept the crazy Cupians quiet and took their minds off their troubles, it might prove a valuable contribution toward simplifying the enforcement of the treaty of Mooni. And so, indeed, it seemed. Toron neglected politics to become a proficient shot, and his anti-Formian movement rapidly subsided. All of which was exactly as I had planned.

The collapse of the Toron movement so pleased the exiled Prince Yuri that he sent a special ambassador to his brother, offering to assist in introducing the new sport to the Cupians at Mooni. But "I fear the Greeks even when bearing doughnuts," as we used to say at Harvard. So Yuri's kind offer was declined. We did, however, present a sample rifle and some of our powder to the authorities of the Imperial University of the ant men at their request, for we could not very well refuse.

Finally King Kew himself condescended to sit in at the conferences between Hah Babbuh, Buh Tedn, Ja Babbuh, Toron, and myself. He had been brooding a good deal recently on the indignities inflicted on his people by Queen Formis, with whom he had had several disputes lately; and the

committee work seemed to divert and cheer him up greatly. But still I was not made a sarkar, although I learned from Lilla that Hah Babbuh had urged this on the king. The influence of Bthuh Sarkari was still too strong. In fact, it was rumored that she now aspired to make herself Queen of Cupia.

Well, I did not mind. Better even one of *her* sons on the throne than Yuri!

Having got the new game well under way, I next turned to my old love, radio. First I obtained some stones from the Howling Valley, which was easy, because of my deafness to Hertizian waves; but I was unable to put them to any practical use. Then I devised a simple wave trap for absorbing the ordinary carrying waves of Porovian speech. Also I arranged a variable condenser, which could so alter the capacity of Cupian antenna as to make selective sending and reception fully possible.

These two devices were combined in a small box which could easily be carried on a man's head and be coupled to his antenna. My third invention along these lines was a broadcasting set, whereby the normal Cupian sending range of four parastads—about fifty yards—was increased to half a stad—about half a mile.

And now, in my frantic quest for a sarkarship, I introduced a still further new game, namely, marching evolutions on an extended scale. Strictly speaking, this was really an adaptation of an old game, rather than the creation of a new, for marching formations had always been popular in Cupia; but my three devices made it possible to perform these evolutions by twelves of thousands.

To this I added the manual of arms from good old I. D. R., 1913 edition. Now they *must* make me a sarkar.

We tried it out in our own twelve thousand. The commander broadcasted his orders to the selectively tuned headsets of the eklats, and they in turn to the pootahs, each of whom then directed his hundred at ordinary wave length. The regimental evolutions went through like clockwork, and *this* idea spread to the other twelve thousands of the country.

But still I was not made a sarkar.

I then turned my attention to the construction of two huge engines, one of which we mounted on a kerkool and one on a concrete base in the courtyard of the university machine shop. The purpose of these engines was for the present kept secret; but I had a feeling that they would win me the sarkarship, even if everything else failed.

As a result of my inventions, King Kew sufficiently unbent to invite me to occupy the reviewing stand with him on Peace Day, when the annual athletic prize giving was to take place. This was a signal honor which even sarkars might envy, but it was not a sarkarship.

The king placed in the hands of Hah Babbuh, Buh Tedn, Ja Babbuh, Prince Toron, and myself the task of arranging for the big meet, and it occurred to Toron that it would be a good idea for the king to broadcast his speech of welcome from the same sending set which was to be used in directing the maneuvers, instead of distributing it on handbills as had been the custom on past Peace Days. When this innovation was announced, athletic clubs from all over the kingdom planned to attend, so that we were able to count on practically all being present at the ceremony.

The morning of the five hundredth anniversary of the Peace of Mooni—three hundred and fifty-eighth in Porovian notation—dawned clear and dazzling. By 460 o'clock the whole plaza and the fields beyond were jammed with marching clubs.

The Minister of Play, who stood with me on the reviewing platform at the crest of University Hill—along with the rest of the cabinet, Prince Toron, and a few leading nobles and professors—sadly remarked that he was afraid the maneuvers would have to be given up.

I replied with a smile that I guessed not; though he was unable to figure out how evolutions could be possible with that huge crowd.

Pistol shooting had recently been introduced as a tentative subject for next year's games, and our committee of five all wore revolvers strapped to our sides, as a special badge in recognition of our responsibility for the gala occasion.

The housetops and roads were crowded with Cupian femininity. All was ready for the grand opening. I adjusted the controls of the big sending set, and dispatched Poblath, who had been detailed as my aide for the day, to inform the king that the time had arrived for his address.

As Kew XII stepped up on the stand, at just 500 o'clock, practically the entire male population of Cupia gave him the United States army present arms in absolute unison. It was an inspiring sight.

I noticed that the king seemed extremely pale and nervous, but I did not give this much thought at the time.

Then I yielded the sending set to him, and he began his speech of welcome, a very different speech from what had been expected, but one which will go down in history, and which every Cupian schoolboy throughout the ages will commit to memory, as American boys do the Gettysburg Address.

Thus spoke King Kew: "Three hundred and fifty-eight years ago to-day our forefathers submitted to the indignities of the treaty of Mooni, and the stigma of that infamous treaty attached to the Kew dynasty, which was then founded. For twelve generations, Cupia has been under the dominion of a race of animals—animals possessing human intelligence, it is true, but still merely lower animals.

"Now the parth of our deliverance is at hand. Those rifles which you hold were not designed for play, but rather for the killing of Formians. The bullets which have been issued to you this day contain the highest explosive known to Porovian science. With these weapons you are invincible. To-day, with your support, Cupia becomes free, and the Kew Dynasty wipes out the stigma of its birth.

"Are you men or slaves? If slaves, you will bow to Formis, your sons and descendants forever will wearily serve out their time in her workshops, she will have veto power over all your self-made laws, your present king will give his body as food for her maggots, and your future kings will cower before her. But if you be men, you will to-day offer up your lives for your country, that Cupia may at last be free!"

A murmur, as of an angry sea, arose from the crowd and smote upon my antenna. I believe that the sporting nature of the proposition appealed to them fully as much as any sentiments of patriotism.

The king turned to me. I saluted. And, before that huge assemblage, he pinned upon my breast the long-forgotten insignia of field marshal of the armies of a nation. Simultaneously Prince Toron and the three professors displayed the insignia of general. Hah Babbuh stepped to my side as my chief of staff, while the other three donned their selective tuners and descended from the platform to take command of their several corps. The stage was all set for the final dénouement.

The king spoke again: "Let all Cupians who are willing to die for king and country raise their hands aloft."

Up shot every hand on the hill and plain below.

I seized the phones and shouted: "Then forward into ant land, for Cupia, King Kew, and Princess Lilla!"

"For Cupia, King Kew, and Princess Lilla!" shouted my army in reply, and the march toward Formia began.

But some Cupian had betrayed us, for at this instant there appeared, at the crest of the hill overlooking the city, a horde of ant men, who debouched in perfect order on the fields beyond the plain. Thank God that they had not arrived before the king's speech!

But even as it was, things were bad enough; our advance companies recoiled in terror before the black assault. Five hundred years of servile peace are not well calculated to develop a nation of fighters. I saw Toron frantically trying to rally his troops, but in vain. It had been easy enough to plan to attack the ant men, but five hundred years of submission had bred a tradition of Formian omnipotence, and this tradition at once revived when the Formians appeared.

I gazed with horror at the scene. Here were thousands upon thousands of presumably intelligent human beings, armed with the most powerful weapons which modern science could produce, and yet retreating in superstitious fear before a handful of un-

armed ants. Had the high resolves of a few parapaths ago degenerated to this?

Why didn't my men use their rifles? Let them fire a few shots, and they would realize their power.

So seizing the phones again I tuned them to Toron's wave-length, and radiated: "For God's sake stop! Never mind your whole army. Just hold two or three. Get them to use their rifles on the enemy. Use your own pistol, too."

Toron did not know who God was, but he sensed the agony of my appeal, and he gathered the idea. Seizing the nearest Cupian by the shoulder, he swung him around, at the same time discharging his own revolver. An ant man exploded.

The Cupian, fascinated, fired his own rifle with equal success. Then, at Toron's peremptory command, a few more of our men halted long enough to try their rifles on the enemy.

At each shot, one Formian exploded. The effect was splendid. Our men stopped, formed ranks again, opened fire, and advanced once more toward Formia. The tradition of Formian invincibility was destroyed forever.

Messengers now came with word that hundreds of kerkools were bringing up ant reinforcements over all the roads leading from the border. But what could jaws avail them against dum-dum bullets?

I learned later that the ants had attacked certain outlying towns of our country earlier in the day, expecting to make easy work of them, and to wreak a vengeance on the unprotected inhabitants. But our casualties there had been surprisingly light. In the village of Beem, in the Okarze Mountains, rocks were used on the attackers, and the chance remark, "Fine target practice!" had suggested to some bright local mind the use of rifles, with which the ant men had been repulsed with ease. At Bartlap, one of the enemy had indiscreetly mentioned that rifles were the cause of the war, and immediately rifles were effectively produced. In most of the other instances the Formians had been recalled to reinforce the attack on Kuana.

Now a new development occurred, for a fleet of airships appeared on the horizon,

and presently high explosive bombs began dropping with frightful havoc among my astounded troops, who once more broke and ran. In a few paraparths the planes would be over the city.

I dispatched Poblath on the run to the university, and soon my human sense of hearing was rewarded by a sharp crack-crack-crack from the Mechanics building.

The first plane toppled and fell. The second. And then the third. The others, sensing a power beyond their ability to combat, wheeled and withdrew. Our armies reformed and once more advanced toward Formia. The first of my huge secret machines, an antiaircraft gun, had spoken.

Soon messengers brought word that intense fighting was in progress for the possession of the Third Gate. Of course it would be many days before our forces could reach the western two, but the bulk of the populations of both countries lived near the Third Gate, due to the mountainous nature of the country to the west.

Then came news that the Formians at the Third Gate had been flanked by some of our men who had surmounted the pale with scaling ladders. The Third Gate fell into the hands of Cupia. Our victorious armies were on enemy soil.

This was far better than the last advance, just before the armistice, in the war against Germany, for now there was to be no armistice. It was war to the hilt! And it satisfied the sporting sense of all Cupia, that the Formians had invaded and attacked first.

A special detachment of Mooni trained aviators and mechanics had gone at once to the three planes as soon as we had shot them down, and now one of them arose into the air fully repaired.

The moment had arrived for the final master stroke in the Cupian national game of war. For the second huge machine in the courtyard of the Department of Mechanics was a sixteen inch barbette coast artillery rifle, which had been trained upon the Imperial City of the ant queen, by exact elevation and azimuth, carefully computed by Buh Tedn.

The huge gun boomed forth. Again and again it boomed, as our spotting plane re-

ported for adjustment of fire. Finally, just at nightfall, the signal came to cease firing. The Imperial City, from which Queen Formis had been directing her troops, was totally destroyed, and with it presumably the queen and her friend and ally, the renegade Yuri.

Our armies still pressed forward into Formia, guarded from air attack by the three repaired planes and by the antiaircraft gun, which had been sent forward by kerkool. I was jubilant. But not so, apparently, King Kew.

"What is the matter, sire?" I asked. "Why do you look so sad on this glorious day of deliverance? Are you thinking of our poor boys who have fallen?"

"No," he replied, "I did not dare tell you before, for fear that your well known impetuosity would disrupt our plans. But now you can know. The Princess Lilla has been missing since morning. The fact that all of her clothes are intact, except her sleeping robe, leads me to think that she must have been kidnaped during the night."

"My God!" I ejaculated in English. Then turning the command over to Hah Babbuh, and instructing him to move his headquarters to the Third Gate in the morning, I hastened to the apartments of my sweetheart.

Bthuh met me there in tears and said: "My princess is dead, my princess is dead! Last night, through connivance with me, Prince Yuri drugged her with saffra root and spirited her away to the Imperial City of Formia. I knew all your plans, except the purposes of your two huge cannons, or I should have warned Yuri of those, too. I thought merely to spoil your victory and so gain my revenge. The old king, too, had spurned my amorous advances, and so I declared war on Cupia. But Cupia has won in spite of me, and as a punishment for my perfidy my beloved mistress has perished."

There could be no doubt of it. Every living thing in the city of the queen had been destroyed. My victory was turned to ashes. In despair I sank upon a couch and buried my face in my hands.

But comforting arms stole around my shoulders, and a soft voice spoke in my antenna: "Cabot, can you ever forgive me?"

I love you so that I would willingly give back to you your princess, just to make you happy. But, alas, she is lost to us forever. Cannot we solace ourselves with love for each other? Cabot, Cabot, I love you so, my dear."

And her fragrant, voluptuous, intoxicating presence wrapped itself around poor tired me.

CHAPTER XVI.

CABOT TELLS THE WORLD.

THERE on the same couch on which I had often caressed the Princess Lilla, I held in my arms her betrayer, the lovely Bthuh. So soon does love forget.

So soon love does *not* forget! Casting aside the seductive betrayer of my princess, I sprang to my feet, vowing never to give up hope until I actually beheld Lilla's dead body, and even then to remain true to her in death. Bthuh's last chance had come and gone. She had played her last card and lost.

Although it was now night, I at once called my aide, and summoned a squad out of my own hundred, which had been retained as the king's godyguard. Then, requisitioning a fleet of kerkools, we set out for the Imperial City, leaving Poblath with his former love, Bthuh.

"Tame her if you can, and good luck to you," was my parting admonition.

The trip was made in record time. By the light of our flash lamps we found that the ruins were guarded by several hundred ant-men; so we sent word that reënforcements were to be furnished in the morning, and then we bivouacked for the night, taking turns keeping awake and sniping at the enemy whenever they showed a light or came within the beams of ours.

Early in the morning, a company of Cupians reported to me, and we at once began the assault of the ruins, carrying our objective with but little difficulty.

Then came the individual fighting in the corridors, and in this the ant-men were not at so great a disadvantage. They ambushed our soliders. They pushed rocks on them from above. And, all in all, they made

away with nearly half our force, before the remaining handful of defenders broke and fled from the city.

Our survivors were put to work exploring. The mangled body of Queen Formis was hailed with joy, but no signs were discovered of either Yuri or Lilla, although occasionally we would come upon an enemy straggler and kill him.

Finally on rounding a turn, whom should I meet face to face but the ant-man who had let me go after I had rescued him from the woofus. I recognized him at once.

"Yahoo! Number 356-1-400," I hailed him, "a life for a life."

"Nay," he replied, "for you owe me nothing on that score. But if you will spare me, I will repay you well."

"Your life is already yours," said I.

"Then," said he, "I will lead you to the princess."

I could have embraced the uncouth creature for joy. But, suspecting a trap, I gathered nearly a squad of my soldiers before following the ant-man. He led us into the subterranean depths of the city. Several times we had to remove fallen fragments which barred our way, and once had to wait until explosives could be obtained to blast a passage. But at last we came within sight of an undamaged dungeon, where Lilla lay chained, alive and well.

Yet even as we hailed her through a crack in the debris, we saw two ant-men enter the dungeon through another passage, unchain the princess, and bear her away.

Quick as a flash I remembered my revolver, and opened fire through the crack, blasting one of her abductors. But, as I drew a bead on the other, my weapon was knocked from my hand.

Turning angrily, I beheld our guide standing over me.

"I fulfilled my bargain," said he, "when I showed you the princess. Now I owe you no more. Those Formians are my fellow countrymen, and I have saved one of them, at least, from the horrible death."

"And lost me my princess," I added in a rage.

We were now surrounded by my squad with drawn rifles, but they did not dare fire, for fear of hitting me. I was at the

mercy of our guide. He had too much respect for the dum-dum bullets, however, and was easily hauled off of me and placed under arrest.

My men then proceeded to hack their way into the dudgeon, and we at once followed the trail of the princess. This was not easy, for the city was a total wreck. A hundred ways presented themselves, through which her captor might have crawled. So we withdrew and threw a cordon around the entire city, dispatching a few searching parties again into the interior. This was made possible by additional reinforcements from headquarters.

As luck would have it, the ant-man finally made his appearance, with Lilla held tightly in his jaws, at the very point in the line of sentries where I happened to be. Instantly a dozen rifles covered him.

But he radiated the peremptory command: "Stop! Put down your rifles."

"Put them down," I ordered.

"Now," he continued, "if a rifle is raised again, I bite, and the princess dies. She lives only on condition that I am given safe passage, *with her as my prisoner*. Once within our lines she will be treated well, for she will prove a valuable hostage to support the demands of Formis for a return to power."

"Formis is dead," I objected.

"One Formis is dead," he replied. "But there are always maggots which we can feed up to make a new queen."

At this point Lilla interjected faintly: "Bite, oh Formian, for I would die, rather than betray my country."

But I said: "You may proceed. Not a rifle will be raised against you, for the princess must be saved."

Nothing however was said about revolvers, and evidently he was unacquainted with that weapon. As he passed through our lines, keeping a careful watch on the rifles of our sentries, I fired my revolver from the hip; and a moment later Lilla was clasped safely in my arms.

Tenderly we greeted each other. She was parched and hungry, and our first task was to give her food and drink, which were easily found among the ruins.

Then came explanations. She had

awakened to find herself in the dungeon about noon of the day before. Yuri had informed her that the Cupian attack had been met and stopped, and that airplanes were about to destroy Kuana. Then he had been hurriedly called away, and she had seen no one since. She could hardly believe us when we told her that the attack had been a success, that Queen Formis was dead, and that the power of Formia was broken forever.

When she had rested, I at once sent her home under guard in a kerkool,* and myself proceeded to headquarters to learn how the war was progressing. Much as I longed to accompany her, my first duty was to my country.

To Number 356-1-400, before leaving, I gratefully offered an honorable freedom in Cupia, but he scornfully replied that he would rather die fighting for his own country. I respected his attitude, and so gave him a safe-conduct through our lines to rejoin his own troops. Later in the war his number was reported to me as being among the casualties.

At headquarters I found Hah Babbuh in fine spirits. The power of Formia was broken indeed!

Our troops had slept in the field under tartan leaves, and had been supplied with food by kerkool from Kuana. In the morning they had attacked again, and the slight remaining Formian resistance had completely collapsed. Advance parties of our forces had occupied without resistance all the ant-cities within easy reach by auto, and foot soldiers were now taking over these cities, which would furnish food and shelter for large numbers of our troops. Some airplanes had actually been shot down by rifle fire, as well as by our captured planes and by our lone antiaircraft gun. Wautoosa had fallen into our hands and with it a number of planes, which thus were added to our steadily growing air-force. Kerkools were patrolling all the roads, shooting ant-men at sight.

Hah was particularly jubilant over what had happened at Mooni. Early on Peace Day, the Cupian students had somehow received word of what was afoot. Joining with the slaves, they had slightly out-

numbered the ant-men there present and had captured the University after a fierce struggle, thus preventing the ant-men from removing or destroying the priceless gems of knowledge stored there. When our vanguard arrived, our students were already in control.

In the days that followed, our advance progressed. City after city fell into our hands, in sufficient numbers and containing sufficient supplies, so that we did not have to give any thought to the quartering or feeding of our men. All that was necessary was a steady stream of ammunition proceed from Kuana to our outposts.

I had given strict orders that Doggo and Yuri were to be taken alive, the former because I wished to spare him as a friend, the latter because I looked forward with extreme pleasure to seeing him executed for treason. But neither was captured. The numbers of all dead ant-men were taken and turned in, but Doggo's number was not among them. And to this day I do not know what became of him or of Yuri.

It was my ambition to exterminate the entire race of ant-men from the face of Poros, with the single exception of my friend Doggo. But this wish was not to be gratified. For, as the Formians retreated southward, our lines of communication became more and more extended, and our troops more and more undisciplined.

Gradually the Formians obtained rifles, particularly from the two cities which they had bombed. Then they made a stand and sent out snipers, and this netted them more rifles.

Our people began to grumble. The widows and orphans of the slain did not appreciate the honor which had been thrust upon them. The sport-loving Cupians in the field chafed under military restraint, and demanded to be returned home to their games. And a considerable number of the populace were even heard to say that two years slavery to Formia was far better than a life-long slavery in the army of a military dictator—meaning the four or five weeks since the war had started.

So, reluctantly, King Kew concluded a new peace with what was left of Formia. A new pale was set up far to the south of

the old. Formia had to bear the entire cost of the war. Ant-men were forbidden to carry arms or to enter Cupia, and all their airships were confiscated. The Kings of Cupia reserved a veto power over Formian laws forever. But King Kew wisely decided not to demoralize Cupia by the introduction of Formian slaves.

Our University set up a branch at Mooni, in order that the glamour of that name might not be lost. Our bravest soldiers, and our war widows, were rewarded by grants of land and of city residences in the captured territory, which almost completely alleviated the popular discontent.

Not until the treaty was concluded did I return from the field. The papers were signed in the same hall at Mooni which had witnessed the degradation of Cupia five hundred years ago; for "defeat is bitterest at the scene of a former victory," as Poblath remarked. And on the occasion of the present treaty, Kew, surrounded by his generals and in the presence of the signatories, was crowned King of all Poros. This idea, by the way, was due to Poblath, the philosopher, and it won him a barsarkarship, which came in very handy.

There was much decorating with medals and handing out of promotions. Needless to state, the king made me a sarkar; and the Assembly, not to be outdone, voted me a winko, or field marshal, for life. How little had I ever dreamed, as I humbly fought under Pershing in France, that one day I should outrank even him.

Now marriage was possible between Lilla and me. And also between Bthuh and Poblath, for Bthuh had proved to be a good sport and had finally accepted him; and, as Lilla had prophesied, Bthuh settled down and became a most quiet and domestic wife.

The proudest and happiest moment of my entire life was when, upon the joining-stand of Kuana in the presence of the assembled multitude, King Kew pronounced the words which made me and Lilla man and wife.

We spent our honeymoon camping out on a most beautiful rocky island in the middle of Lake Luno, which lies nestled in the hills and surrounded by deep woods, about a thousand stads to the northwest of Kuana.

I had discovered the place by accident, while on an airplane trip to an isolated mountain community immediately after the war, for the purpose of conferring decorations on the first company which had stood its ground against the onslaught of the ant-men.

The walls of the island rise sheer some nine parastads from the water's edge, save where in one spot the sloping sward runs through a cleft in the rocks to a sandy beach. The interior of the island slopes gently from the cliffs down from all sides to a little pond in the center, and is about equally divided between lawn and stately grove. Here Lilla and I plan to build.

Here we spent many golden days, swimming and fishing and climbing, but mostly just looking into each other's eyes.

At our first dip in the water, I was horribly embarrassed. In the first place, I had to shed my headset, which always puts me at a disadvantage. And, in the second place, my wings came unstuck and fell off, and my matted hair exposed my ears, so that I stood before her an earth-man, with all my horrible earthly deformities. Yet, still she loved me.

Our honeymoon was idyllic and ideal. But all good things must end, and we finally had to return to the city to take up my duties, for added to my honors was a place in the Royal Cabinet as Minister of Play, the former incumbent having died during my absence.

I have various projects in hand for my adopted country. Already a network of radio stations is going up throughout the land. A systematic extermination of the whistling bee is under way by means of anti-aircraft artillery. Various earth devices are being tested out in our laboratories as fast as I can recall them to memory. And I have resumed, but with great precautions, my experiments on the wireless transmission of matter, in which work Toron is assisting.

Lilla and I occupy her old suite in the palace, and entertain constantly; among our most frequent guests are my old friend Poblath and his completely tamed wife.

But often I wonder what has become of

Doggo and Yuri. In spite of present prosperity, Cupia is not safe, if the renegade prince still lives on the planet. But I hope that Doggo survives, and that we shall meet again.

Fate now seems to be through with its hard knocks. But, happy as I am, I occasionally wonder what is going on in dear old Boston, whether the Germans ever paid up, whether America ever joined the League to Prevent Future Wars, whether the American Legion ever forgave Jack Dempsey, etc., etc. And I occasionally have a yearning to write home.

Of course, the obvious step for me was to attempt communication by radio, so I built a particularly powerful sending set with long wave length. But the lack of any reply convinced me that my signals were not being received on earth.

So recently I got together my old committee of five: Hah Babbuh, Buh Tedn, Ja Babbuh, Toron and myself; and together we designed a super gun and a streamline projectile, and computed the necessary powder-charge and principles of aiming, so that we could shoot that projectile to the earth.

Then I prepared this manuscript in quadruplicate, with three of which copies I shall try to reach the world. For this purpose, each copy will be placed in a gold cylinder and be swathed in the fur of the fire-worm, that peculiar creature which dares to live almost at the edge of the boiling seas, because its matted fur is the most perfect insulator against heat known on Poros.

The swathed cylinder will then be packed into the interior of the projectile, and a covering put on, especially calculated to resist the devouring heat of passage through the atmospheres of the two planets. The projectile will be weighed, its center of gravity will be determined, and its moments of inertia will be tested, the firing data being corrected accordingly. It will be placed in the gun. Then, at exactly the appointed time, the gun will be discharged, and may God speed my message on its way to you, my earth-brethren.

Myles S. Cabot.



Fool Proof

By LUKE THOMAS

WHEN Walter Lathrop started on his way to kill Jack Freyne, it was one o'clock of a Sunday afternoon.

On Park Avenue people were hurrying home to dinner; men in silk hats and women in furs; baby carriages pushed by uneasy fathers; citizens from further east proving the democracy of leisure. The benches along the midway were settled with New York's two ruling classes, enjoying the first sunshine of April; the housemaids in unfriendly colors, the tradesmen in uniform black.

Lathrop turned to cross east on a street in the middle Fifties, swearing softly at the traffic as he waited for the green signal light. He crossed Park Avenue and then Lexington, stopped in the entrance to a house of small apartments, and pushed the button opposite a card bearing Freyne's name. He didn't lift the telephone, but waited with his hand on the door knob. He knew that on this morning Freyne would

have slept late, heated a sketchy breakfast in the kitchenette, and would now be alone, possibly dressing to go out for lunch. He rang the bell again. This time the latch clicked, and he pushed the door open and started up the stairs.

As he reached the first landing he heard Freyne's voice above.

"Who's that?"

He didn't answer, but went on to the second flight. At the top he saw Freyne, dressed except for his coat, peering over the banisters. Lathrop kept his head lowered until he had finished the climb, and Freyne backed into the room, holding the door open.

"Hello, Walter. Why didn't you yell out? I couldn't see who you were."

Lathrop walked into the apartment and put down the hand-bag he carried.

"I wasn't sure you'd want to see me," he answered.

"Why?"

"You know damn well why."

Freyne had closed the door, and turned to stare at his visitor who stood with his hands still in the pockets of his coat.

He laughed. "You make me think of a lot of reasons. But as long as you're here suppose you tell me what it's all about."

Lathrop hadn't moved, and his voice was quiet. "I've come up here to kill you," he said.

Freyne wore the irresolute smile of a man listening to a foreign language. "Well, that's nice of you. When do we begin?"

"Sit down over there," Lathrop pointed to a chair. His expression had the impassive, stubborn fixity which at times lends strength even to a weak face. His eyes, showing the whites underneath, had an almost hypnotic authority.

"What's the matter with you?" Freyne asked.

Lathrop took an automatic pistol from his pocket and fingered the hammer. "Sit down."

This time Freyne laughed more naturally. "Good Lord." He turned his back on the man with the gun, walked to the table in the center of the room, and lit a cigarette.

"You've got all the technique," he said. "I've always wondered what a stick-up looked like, but I never picked you for the part. What do we do now?"

Lathrop laid the pistol on the palm of his left hand. "You sit over there and I'll take the useless trouble to explain to you. It's very hard to handle an automatic with these gloves on when you walk around like that."

"All right. I'll sit down," and Freyne dropped into the chair. "Now, what's all the shootin' for?"

An elevated train roared its way up Third Avenue, and Lathrop waited till it had passed. Then he said slowly, "You're a swine and a skunk and a yellow pup. The only drawback to killing you is that some human being would probably have to die, too. I'm going to take a chance."

Freyne sank deeper in the chair and stretched out his legs. "That gun is certainly a help to your vocabulary," he said. "Put it away and hang up your coat, and I'll beat your head off."

"No, thanks," said Lathrop. "You get no more chance than any other rat."

"Well then," Freyne rejoined, "leaving out the word pictures for a minute, will you tell me what's eating you?"

"Do you need telling?"

"I'd hate to think you were pulling all this Grand Guignol stuff just because you were sore about some dame. If it's that—Jean Avery that's on your mind, I'll tell you right now—"

With a move of the pistol Lathrop stopped him. "As long as you know, that's enough. We'll get this over with. Have you got a pencil and paper?"

"Just a minute," Freyne interrupted. "If you've got a little Sunday afternoon shooting planned out here, let's do it right. I believe the customary procedure is to allow the victim time to explain and repent."

"You can't explain anything."

"I can't if you wave that Roman candle around in front of me," Freyne said. "At least go somewhere where I can't see you."

Lathrop didn't move. "I don't want to hear you," he said. "I hate the sound of your voice."

Freyne was watching him as carefully as a batter watches the man in the box.

"If you don't like it," he said, "go on, cut loose with your barrage. You called me yellow a minute ago. I'm not afraid of any bird who has to go around chaperoned with a machine gun."

"You're brave enough to fight fair," Lathrop said, "but you're too yellow to live fair. You take a young girl who's fool enough to fall for your snake's eyes and this bunk of yours—"

"You mean I take her away from you."

"Shut up. Do you know where she is now?"

"No, and I don't give a damn." Freyne had gradually drawn his feet back under the chair. "That's what I want to tell you about." Slowly, as if to point his remarks, he crouched forward. Lathrop raised the pistol.

"Sit still," he ordered. "I know where she is, and how she got there. That's why I'm here."

Freyne sat back again. After a moment he asked seriously: "Do you really think

you're coming up here, on account of some bughouse idea, and try to shoot me and get away with it?"

"Exactly."

The door of a taxi slammed below, and Lathrop went to the window. It was across the street.

"Listen to me," Freyne said. "I spent three years in France in two armies. I've been more scared for six months on end, than I am of you and your melodrama stuff."

Lathrop had returned to stand opposite Freyne's chair, and his eyes still showed the whites underneath.

"Most people aren't afraid of death," he said. "It's dying they're afraid of. A shell or a bullet hits you before you know it. But if you could see it coming all the way, watch it for hours or days—That's what she did. Sat—alone, and waited for it. You didn't know she was dead, did you? I remember you said you didn't give a damn."

Freyne moved to throw away his cigarette, and a bit of the paper stuck to his lips. He moistened them with his tongue.

"And that's what'll happen to you," he said. "Did you ever see a man electrocuted? See him walk in while two men hold him up? Walk to a thing like a chair in a country barber shop and sit down with a helmet over his head, and wait? Talk about seeing it coming, that's what you'll get if you don't sober up."

"I'm not worried about that," Lathrop leaned back against the table. "Electric chairs, gallows, guillotines, they're just scarecrows to keep morons from losing their tempers. I'm not angry with you any more than the man who throws the switch is angry at the poor dope fiend in the chair. You won't be murdered. You'll be executed. I've planned every detail of this thing as carefully as a surgical operation. There'll be no mysterious clues, no finger prints or third degrees or alibis when I'm through with you."

Freyne wasn't smiling now. He lay still in the chair, a little pale.

"They'll get you though," he said. "You'll smell that leather helmet and the breath of the fellow that wore it last. They'll

get you, just like the rest of the wise guys that try to beat the game."

"You think so?"

"I know it. They'll get you."

"We'll see."

Freyne grunted a laugh. "Yes, and even if you shoot that whole clip into me, when they do get you, I'll know it, wherever I am. Yes, and I'll laugh and you'll hear me. When you shuffle up to that wicked wooden chair, I'll laugh like hell, and you'll hear me."

"When you're dead," Lathrop said, "and I leave here, they won't even look for me. The poor rats that get caught haven't the brains to think their way out. I'm not going to die for the pleasure of killing a thing like you. I've thought my way out."

"You think you've thought it out till you find somebody who can think better than you do," Freyne said.

"For instance," asked Lathrop, "some fat-head New York detective?"

"Anybody," Freyne answered. "Anybody can think better than you do as long as you're thinking crooked. You may not be a moron, but as long as your head's full of a crazy idea like this, anybody who thinks straight can put it over you."

Lathrop leaned away from the table and stood up.

"Well, you can't," he said, "because you won't be here."

Freyne went right on. "You've heard them say 'murder will out,' haven't you? That's not a fairy story, it's a fact. Every dirty trick turns up sooner or later, same reason a dead thing floats—because it's rotten—rotten like your 'brains.'"

"You go sit over there at that desk," Lathrop pointed the way.

"What for?" Freyne asked without moving.

"I want you to write something."

"What?"

"Notice of your suicide. Then your 'straight thinkers' won't have to think about me."

"Oh," Freyne sneered, "that's the scheme of the master mind, is it?" He sank deep in the chair and crossed his feet. "Well, you can go straight to hell. There's no use talking to you. You're either full

of hop, or been crazy all your life. Go on and do your stuff."

Lathrop drew back the sleeve of the automatic and released it, throwing a cartridge into the chamber and leaving the hammer at full cock.

"Go over there and write it."

"Go to hell."

Lathrop leveled the gun.

"Get up."

For a long minute Freyne sat still, staring, and his eyes focused way beyond the man before him. Then, "all right," he said dully, and got up. "I never have made a will. Might be a good thing."

He crossed and sat at the small desk with his back to the room. He picked up a pencil, but did not begin to write at once, crouching over the paper motionless, fingers drumming on the table. Once he glanced jerkily over his shoulder, but Lathrop was fumbling in the black hand bag, not watching him. Freyne began to write, slowly. Lathrop came and stood behind him. In his hand was a length of clothes line knotted at one end in a noose.

"You're taking a lot of time about it," Lathrop said.

Freyne was biting the pencil.

"I won't write anything," he said, "if you stand there. It's rotten manners."

"Hurry up about it."

Lathrop walked to a window and looked out. In the street, children, released from Sunday dinner, were playing ball. Base hits rolled under passing cars, into cellars and open windows, pursued by the fielders as heedless of traffic and pedestrians as though the narrow pavement had been the Yankee Stadium, as they dreamed it was.

On the brown stone steps women without age or figure squatted and retold the household happenings of a day like every other day. Chimes were ringing from a near by church, punctuated by the cackle of a motor horn. The smell of warm asphalt and gasoline and frying grease drifted up.

Freyne moved in his chair. Lathrop came again and stood behind him.

"Guess that's all," Freyne said.

Lathrop read over his shoulder:

Will and last testament, e'er renouncing life and this horrible risk of punishment. Know-

ing I leave little estate devisable, my everything I now confer on Louis, dear brother, last of our descendants.

"That's a pretty poor effort," Lathrop remarked.

Freyne wiped the palms of his hands on his shirt-sleeves.

"It's all you get," he said. "How much of a legal document do you think your master mind could compose while some lunatic was stalking around with a gun?"

"Sign it."

As Freyne finished writing his name, Lathrop dropped the noose over Freyne's body down to the elbows, and drew it tight around the back of the chair. The chair went over backwards. Freyne threw his feet over his head like a wrestler, and the chair followed, crashing down on his legs as they struck the floor.

The back of the chair rested on Freyne's neck, and Lathrop flung his weight on it, pinning him like a bear in a dead-fall. Freyne's voice was hoarse and panting.

"What do you want to do? Break my neck?"

Lathrop didn't answer. With the remaining length of the rope he tied Freyne to the chair as tightly as a limb in a splint. Then he heaved it upright and stood away.

"What's the matter with you," Freyne swallowed hard. He could barely speak. "Can't you shoot a man unless he's tied?"

"I'm not going to shoot you," Lathrop said. He went to the black satchel and took out a wad of something like brown worsted. He examined the two windows and in the cracks of the sashes he stuffed thin strips of the material.

Freyne's eyes as he watched were like those of a patient in a dentist's chair when the doctor opens another drawer of instruments.

Lathrop went to the doors, and around the edges he packed more of the brown strings. Freyne saw that it was oakum that ship-builders use to calk the seams of a hull, and all expression left his face.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

Lathrop opened a bureau drawer and took a pair of silk socks and a necktie. Going behind the chair, he jammed the socks through Freyne's teeth and tied them

there with the necktie. Then he came and stood in front of him.

"I don't want you to talk," he said, "because you might interrupt me. Besides, you might make too much noise. You might get scared. You said men do when they see it coming. You're going to die slowly, the way Jean Avery saw it coming, and then you're going to die slowly, the way she died. I wonder if you'll stand it as well as she did."

Lathrop took hold of the chair and turned it to face the window.

"I'm going to let you look out here the way you used to when you'd watch for a taxi to stop, and listen for the doorbell that gave you just two or three minutes to sleek your hair and light a pipe and take the proper theatrical pose on that sofa to make some fool girl think you had temperament."

Lathrop quietly crossed the room and opened the door of the tiny kitchenette. He jerked the rubber tube loose from the gas stove, carried the end as far as it would reach into the room, and turned on the gas.

Not a sound had come from Freyne. Lathrop returned to the window.

"You won't have to turn around to see it coming. You'll see it right over those house tops, as far as your eye can reach. It's coming now, but you don't see it. You will soon. I'll know when you do because I'm watching you. You won't need to speak. You won't ever speak again, with that damn plausible, filthy voice of yours. I won't disturb you for a while. Let me know when you see it coming."

Lathrop folded his arms and leaned against the window jamb. His eyes never left Freyne's face—Freyne staring out of the window, his mouth stretched wide over the silk tie, breathing in short quick breaths, through his nose.

Much more faintly came the sound of the gas flowing from the open tube. Lathrop could hardly detect the nauseous, sweet stench, but his eyes never left Freyne's face.

The cries of the children in the street seemed getting louder. A rare Sunday train thundered by on the L, and a wagon with

metal tires rattled over the Third Avenue cobbles.

Suddenly Freyne's gaze withdrew from the sky line. His mouth twitched and he jerked his head to stare with a look of sick horror at Lathrop.

"You see it now, do you? Yes, the gas is leaking. It's leaking fast. But it will take a long time coming. A couple of hours at least, I should think."

Lathrop started away, but stopped at the strangled rasp of terror that came from Freyne's throat.

"No, I'm not going to leave you—the way you left her."

He went again to the hand bag, took out a gas mask, and put it on the table.

"I told you I'd figured this out carefully. I can't afford to miss anything. Besides I want to give you something to think about. Here's a letter. It's from Bridgeport, dated last Monday—two days before she died. I want to read it to you before this gas gets too thick."

Freyne leaped against the tight cords, and the chair creaked and staggered. His feet hammered the floor. Lathrop took a cushion from the couch and wedged it under Freyne's feet.

"I can't read," he said, "if you make that racket." He opened the letter. "I'll leave out the first part because it's about herself and it's written to me. You wouldn't understand. Further on she says, 'Jack Freyne promised to come and see me, but he hasn't come or written. I wouldn't mind the loneliness so much if I didn't feel so deserted.'—she's in a boarding house, you know, with a cheap doctor; 'I had to tell the family I was visiting at Westport. They expect me back now, but I can't travel yet, so if you see them, tell them I'm all right and coming home soon. Tell Jack not to be afraid. There's nothing more to worry about. If I could only see him for a minute I wouldn't make a scene; tell him I promise on my word of honor. If he could come just for an hour—'"

Freyne gave another wrench against the ropes and fell back choking. Lathrop sniffed.

"God, that stuff is getting strong. It makes my head ache."

He stood directly in front of Freyne and started to put on the gas mask.

"You know," he said, "the more you struggle and the harder you breathe, the more you'll inhale. Better take it easy. Watch it coming." And he slipped the mask over his face.

The light was getting dim. Lathrop drew a chair close to the window, and through the lenses of the mask, read the letter over to himself. Then he put it away and turned to stare at Freyne. Freyne was breathing with an effort that was almost a snore, but short and quick.

The light faded till it was impossible to see a face, but Lathrop listened to the quick breaths. The children were called to their homes and the streets were quiet. Lights were lighted.

Once the telephone rang, repeating, insistent. Probably an appointment that Freyne had failed to keep. Lathrop let it ring until, discouraged, it stopped.

Once Lathrop rose and felt the pulse of the man in the chair, then sat down again. For an hour there was nothing to be seen in the room but the silhouette of a giant baboon, watching a man in a chair. No sound but the church bells outside, and within, a steady low hissing, as of gas escaping from a pipe.

Lathrop rose and loosed the cord that held the man in the chair. Taking the body under the shoulders he dragged it across the room and laid it on the couch. The clothes line he rolled up and dropped in the bag with the necktie and the socks. At the door he listened a long time, then opened it, stepped quickly through, and closed it tight. The gas mask he stuffed in the bag, put on his hat, and passed out to the street where he turned west toward Park Avenue.

Twenty-fours later Lathrop answered a ring at his door.

"Are you Walter Lathrop?"

"Yes."

"I'm Detective Lannen of the Homicide Squad. The inspector wants to see you at headquarters."

"What for?"

"The Freyne murder. You're under arrest, so—let's go."

When Cary Lee came in from his work on the morning edition of *The Messenger*, I was eager for details of the biggest exclusive story the paper had had in years.

"As a matter of fact," said Cary, "a newspaper is like a baseball team. You never can tell when some rookie will crack the ball into the bleachers. The fellow that dug that Freyne story and got Lathrop arrested, is a kid still going to night school. He works on the Sunday Magazine section. You'd never guess where. He does cross-word puzzles, number squares, you know, nut stuff that people go crazy over. 'What word of twelve letters indicating a chemical compound is indicated by a small crustacean of the West Indies using the dial telephone system?' That kind of thing.

"Well, here." Cary searched his pocket. "You remember that farewell message Freyne was supposed to have left?" Cary unfolded a paper. "Listen, 'Will and last testament e'er renouncing life and this horrible risk of punishment. Knowing I leave little estate devisable, my everything I now confer on Louis, dear brother, last of our descendants.' Darn fool kind of thing to write, isn't it? It shouldn't be 'will and last testament,' it's 'last will and testament.' What does 'last of our descendants' mean? Nothing. It's all phoney. Well, here's the way the cross-word kid typed it out." Cary gave me the paper.

The initial letter of each word of Freyne's message was printed on a line, the remaining letters vertically below. Read across the line, the initials spelled:

"WALTER LATHROP KILLED ME IN COLD BLOOD."

I spelled out each word in amazement. "Good Lord," I said, "think of a man knowing he was going to be killed, and figuring out a thing like that with the other fellow standing over him."

"Yes," said Cary, "pretty quick thinking. But what gets me is a man like Lathrop doping out a gilt-edged scheme for killing Freyne, and then missing out on this childish trick. The trouble is with these nuts that plan all the fancy crimes, once their minds get running crooked, they never can think straight."

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